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ABSTRACT

This paper explores a common assumption: that education must be made an open, interconnected chain of learning opportunities, available to people from cradle to grave, i.e., a "learning society." Learning is examined in the following three distinct, but interrelated, domains: the domain of work; the domain of the community; and the domain of politics. The focus is on the following four key elements of the learning process: collaboration; communication; critical thinking; and creativity. The paper is organized into five chapters. Following an introductory chapter discussing purpose and definitions, Victoria Marsick explores the concept of the learning organization, looking at the organizational learning process and ways to facilitate learning for the organization as a system and for individuals in the system. In the third chapter, Jeanne Bitterman takes up the larger entity of the learning community, using theories and models such as social learning, situational cognition, and communities of practice to describe ways to develop group learning and communicative competence. The potential of the learning society is then examined by Ruud van der Veen, who describes changes in the domain of politics and the learning of political systems. The chapter also addresses the role of adult educators in helping citizens learn how to take effective political action. The final chapter draws conclusions about the nature of collective learning and raises questions for future research and practice. (Contains 137 references.) (KC)

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From the Learning Organization to Learning Communities toward a Learning Society

Information Series No. 382

by Victoria Marsick

Jeanne Bitterman

Ruud Van der Veen

ERIC

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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From the Learning Organization to Learning Communities toward a Learning Society

Information Series No. 382

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Foreword

The Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education (ERIC/ACVE) is 1 of 16 clearinghouses in a national information system that is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. This paper was developed to fulfill one of the functions of the clearinghouse—interpreting the literature in the ERIC database. This paper should be of interest to adult education practitioners, researchers, and students.

ERIC/ACVE would like to thank Victoria J. Marsick, Jeanne Bitterman, and Ruud van der Veen for their work in preparing this paper. Dr. Marsick, Professor of Adult & Organizational Learning, directs adult education graduate programs in the Department of Organization & Leadership at Columbia University. She has published a substantial body of work on learning organizations, including ***Sculpting the Learning Organization*** and ***Facilitating the Learning Organization***, co-authored with Karen Watkins. She is co-director of a 5-year grant from the J. M. Huber Corporation to set up a research center on learning in organizations.

Dr. Jeanne Bitterman has served as a core faculty member for adult education graduate programs in teaching, advising, and research roles at Teachers College, Columbia University. She has served as a consultant for the training and continuing education programs of a number of organizations, including St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center, Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center, and Bronx Community College. She developed an innovative "Academy of Learning" for Health Continuum Partners, Inc.

Dr. Ruud van der Veen is a senior faculty member of the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands and Adjunct Professor of Adult and Continuing Education, Columbia University. He was founding director of the Dutch Center of Social Policy. Among his recent publications are the chapter "Adult Education in the Light of the Risk Society" (co-authored by T. Jansen) in ***The Learning Society: Challenges and Trends*** and "The Transformation of Community Education" in ***Adult Education and Social Responsibility: Reconciling the Irreconcilable?***

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Executive Summary

The impetus for this monograph is the profound transformation that communities and societies are undergoing. It explores a common assumption: that education must be made an open, interconnected chain of learning opportunities available to people from cradle to grave, what some are calling a learning society. The paper attempts to answer the questions: How do these social units collectively learn? And how can adult educators work with these social units to enhance their learning? Learning is examined in three distinct, but interrelated, domains: *the domain of work*, both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations where people work for a living, where they earn their money, where they are "employed"; *the domain of the community*, groups organized for leisure, personal goals, and interpersonal relationships; and *the domain of politics*, especially Western post-welfare states that are searching for effective solutions for governing the state, protecting the social environment, keeping peace, and combating poverty. The focus is on four key elements of the learning process: collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity.

Victoria Marsick explores the concept of the learning organization, looking at the organizational learning process and ways to facilitate learning for the organization as a system and for individuals in the system. Jeanne Bitterman takes up the larger entity of the learning community. She uses such theories and models as social learning, situated cognition, and communities of practice to describe ways to develop group learning and communicative competence. The potential of the learning society is examined by Ruud van der Veen, who describes changes in the domain of politics and the learning of political systems. He addresses the role of adult educators in helping citizens learn how to take effective political action. The final chapter draws conclusions about the nature of collective learning and raises questions for future research and practice.

Information on the topics in this paper may be found in the ERIC database using the following descriptors: Adult Education, Adult Learning, Community Change, Learning Theories, Organizations (Groups), Politics, and the identifiers Learning Organizations, Learning Communities, and Learning Society.

Introduction

The impetus for this monograph is the profound transformation that communities and societies are undergoing. Susan Imel identified some of these changes in her "brief" to us for this volume: movement toward a knowledge society, technological and multimedia revolutions, globalization, new patterns of work and unemployment, social exclusion and inclusion, health challenges and improvements, aging of the population, immigration shifts, and consumerism. We explore a common assumption put to us by Imel that "education must be made an open, interconnected chain of learning opportunities available to people from cradle to grave, what some are calling a 'learning society.' A learning society is one in which people are encouraged to engage in knowing themselves, each other, and the world."

Purpose and Definitions

Our purpose is to describe, interpret, synthesize, and critique current thinking about the collective learning of social units. We write, therefore, to adult educators, facilitators, curriculum specialists, counselors and other learning specialists who are reexamining their role in light of the new millennium. Our central question is twofold. How do these social units collectively learn? And how can adult educators work with these social units to enhance their learning?

We use "collective learning of social units" and "systems learning" as umbrella terms that describe the learning of groups of people within a social unit who join together for a common purpose. In the following chapters, we look at learning in three distinct, but interrelated, domains:

- *The domain of work*, which includes both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations where people work for a living, where they earn their money, where they are "employed."
- *The domain of the community*, which includes groups organized for leisure, personal goals, and interpersonal relationships–both traditional communities such as the family, church, or neighborhood; and late-modern communities such as lifestyles and personal networks (including health, spiritual, recreational, and alternative family communities).
- *The domain of politics*, which includes civic polities and nation-states, typically in this monograph, Western post-welfare states that are searching for effective solutions for governing the state, protecting the social environment, keeping peace, and combating poverty.

Each chapter focuses on a different social unit. Marsick examines learning organizations, Bitterman discusses learning communities, and Van der Veen writes about learning societies. In each chapter, we define terms and identify foundational theories and models, examine system level dynamics of learning and change, and speak to implications for facilitating learning within these systems.

Collective Learning Framework

We begin with the assumption that social units can collectively learn, and they do so through their members. Representatives of the system act on its behalf; the system as a whole is said to make decisions, communicate alternative options, reflect on results, and draw on collective memory. Social units have a common purpose and a set of rules for how they will act to achieve their goals (Argyris and Schön 1978, 1996). Systems learn through what John Dewey (1938) described as "inquiry": "the intertwining of thought and action that proceeds from doubt to the resolution of doubt. . . . doubt is construed as the experience of a "problematic situation," triggered by a mismatch between the expected results of action and the results achieved" (in Argyris and Schön 1996, p. 11). Individuals inquire on behalf of the system. The system learns when designated members recognize and use this learning to change mental models, culture, structure, and agreed practices. However, the learning of individuals and of systems may not be highly conscious, and it may also serve to confirm current points of view rather than question them.

We argue that the purpose and rules of many systems today are explicitly and implicitly challenged in a rapidly changing environment. Turbulence opens possibilities for new forms of social life as people experiment with new ways of organizing themselves. People move frequently, and not always voluntarily, in and out of systems when they no longer find themselves in tune with the social unit's purpose or rules. Social units can learn from experience, but they do not always do so even when individuals learn on behalf of the system. First, it is not always clear who is authorized, formally or informally, to act on behalf of the system. Power rapidly moves among constituencies in unstable systems. Leadership is attributed as much to intangible personal qualities as to the development of well-considered agendas. Second, the system may not be structured in such a way that people who make decisions on its behalf notice and draw upon the learning of its members. People in power may not agree with these members or encourage communication that enables full, free, and informed consideration of new ideas. The structure and culture of systems may not be open to the changes that are needed for new ideas to be heard and implemented.

Finally, we adopt the framework of *self-organizing systems* to understand how social units draw on members' learning. Self-organizing systems have these key features:

- They are *open systems* that respond constantly to outside environmental influences, and as such, are often in a state that is far from equilibrium.
- They can *create* new structures and new modes of behavior.
- They develop in a *nonlinear*, multicausal manner that is catalyzed by feedback loops. (Capra 1996, p. 85)

Social units act on the basis of their social *construction* of reality (Schwandt 1994). In order to act more effectively and cohesively as a unit, people need to make their reasoning, intentions, and patterns more explicit, complete, and informed. They also reconcile and integrate differences as they achieve common understanding, agreement, commitment, and actions.

The constructed nature of reality is of paramount importance given the postmodern conditions of an increasingly complex and dynamic society which Habermas (1985) described in terms of the "new obscurity" of our world. The more complex and dynamic the context, the less a social unit can rely on standardized, stable, habitual practices from the past. People experiment with new approaches based on frequent, ad hoc assessments of the changing environment. They rely for coherence on flexible informal cultures more than on formal structures.

Focus and Limits

Although we discuss many elements in the learning processes of social units, we focus especially on four key elements: collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity.

First, groups of any kind cannot learn as a unit without the capacity to collaborate and constructively identify conflict. In some cases, collaboration involves widespread participation and power sharing; in other cases it is limited either in scope or in nature. We raise questions about who becomes involved, and whether or not they have equal say in setting direction.

Second, learning is shared externally and internally through clear communication. Social units seek external feedback, often through environmental scanning and interaction with customers, suppliers, or others in their networks. Internally, people make sense of feedback, reach consensus about its interpretation, and decide on actions. Ideally, communication is no longer one-way and hierarchical; people participate no matter what their level and function.

Third, people need the ability and permission to think critically and act autonomously. When this is the case, people are less likely to withhold good ideas. They actively search for distortions in the social unit's constructions of the promulgated reality. They recognize when standard behaviors are no longer optimal, and work together to rethink old solutions and generate new ones on an "ad hoc" basis that are a better fit with the challenge.

Fourth, learning is an ongoing, creative process of inventing solutions to new challenges. Learning communities frequently seek innovation. They typically learn by experimentation that engages cognitive, affective, and sensory capabilities.

Ideas in the literature are often posed as ideal possibilities that cannot easily be implemented. For learning to be "socially owned," some percentage of the social unit must be in agreement about basic values and purposes. Reaching such agreements invariably requires negotiation among different points of view. Negotiation of differences can lead, ideally, to an enriched, integrated perspective built upon free, full, open, fair, and critical dialogue.

However, as we also explore in this volume, social units are rife with inequities that reflect power differences and limiting prejudices involving gender, race, class, and citizenship. There are many gaps between ideal and actual practices. For

example, communication should be multidirectional and respectful of the full autonomy of all members. However, communication is less than full, free, informed, critical, and welcoming of difference. Ideally, members learn from their experiences; in practice, the rapid pace of change often precludes time for reflection and evaluation. Divergent thinking is needed to generate novel solutions (Leonard-Barton 1995). In reality, conflicts may be suppressed or managed based on unexplored beliefs about whose ideas are best.

We argue here that the learning competencies demanded by the rapidly changing environment are not likely to emerge naturally and smoothly without intervention. Members of social units need to change the way in which they understand themselves, their relationships with others, and the way in which they act to achieve goals. Social units, likewise, need to be redesigned in order to support learning and change. In this volume we speak to the role of educators as change agents who help the entire social unit to learn more effectively as well as the individuals within these units who seek their own goals as they participate in learning systems.

Marsick begins with a discussion of organizational learning. Organizations funnel the energies of people toward profit making even when enlightened, far-seeing leaders believe that fulfilled people who engage in learning in other spheres of life will also be happier, more productive contributors to the company. Next, Bitterman looks at learning communities that transcend the boundaries of many social, geographic, and functional entities. She explores the tensions that arise because individuals who seek out others in community both shape those groups and are shaped by other societal needs and interests. Then, van der Veen considers the learning society. He looks at the learning of political groups and the participation of citizens in the learning of the political system. The concluding chapter lays out a view of systems learning, compares common themes, and raises critical questions that grow out of our thinking.

Learning Organizations

by Victoria J. Marsick

A small number of researchers have long been interested in organizational learning. Scholars sought to understand how organizations learn behaviorally over time from experience (March and Olsen 1975) and showed how cultures are created and maintained that prevent learning (Argyris and Schön 1978, 1996). They described organizations as having a collective memory, and looked at ways in which information was acquired, stored, retrieved, and managed (Huber 1991). But it is only in the last decade that interest in organizational learning has grown exponentially. Businesses and individuals are seeking ways to cultivate learning proactively as they make the transition to a knowledge-intensive era. This chapter explores the idea of a learning organization and the dynamics of collective learning within and across work units. It also describes ways in which adult educators can facilitate such learning for the system as a whole, and for individuals within the system.

The Learning Organization

People have found the idea of a learning organization to be inspiring, yet difficult to implement. It frequently involves deep change in the mind sets of people as well as the culture of organizations and societies. Such change does not occur overnight. Yet, the fortunes of companies rise and fall quickly; people hold jobs for increasingly shorter periods of time; and leaders are expected to make their mark within quarterly reporting periods. As Rifkin (1995) has noted, the very nature of jobs is changing. People no longer work for the same organization for their entire career. As often as not, employees telecommute or use technology to communicate regularly with people around the world. Knowledge bases outgrow themselves in extremely short time frames, and people find their expertise rapidly challenged.

Definition

The learning organization is one response to these changes. The concept emphasizes the following (Gephart, Marsick, and Van Buren 1997; Marsick and Watkins 1998):

1. **Continuous learning at the systems level.** Individuals are expected to learn frequently and to share their learning in ways that enable the larger system to learn. This involves more than one level of learning (individuals, teams, organization as a whole) but it may not always include everyone and may not always involve all possible levels.
2. **Knowledge generation and sharing.** Employees are called upon to think in new ways; critically in order to identify assumptions; and collaboratively through dialogue with one another about work. Value is placed on creating, capturing, and moving knowledge rapidly and fluidly so that people who need it can access and use it quickly.

3. **Systemic thinking capacity.** Employees are asked to think systemically in order to see linkages and feedback loops.
4. **Greater participation and accountability by a larger percentage of employees.** Ideas and information should emerge from those who have something to contribute, regardless of their position in the organization. Increased accountability demands new learning.
5. **Culture and structure of rapid communication and learning.** Learning is rewarded, supported, and promoted from the top down and through various reward systems. At least on paper, people are expected to take calculated risks, experiment, learn from their mistakes, and share information freely across boundaries.

Table 1 reflects similarities and differences among different ways in which this concept has been operationalized, some of which are next discussed.

Table 1: Areas of Agreement and Disagreement among Learning Organization Models

Models Agree	Models Disagree
Continuous Learning at Systems Level ... that people need to learn continuously throughout the lifespan to keep up with the changing nature of work and new careers. ... that work should be structured to allow experimentation and learning from mistakes–within reasonable limits of safety and risk.	... about how much responsibility lies with the individual or organization for initiation, resource allocation, planning and assessment. ... about the degree of emphasis placed on learning vs. performance, and the way in which people help each other learn on the job.
Knowledge Generation and Sharing ... that innovation is needed, which typically involves double-loop or generative learning that involves questioning assumptions behind work and the structure/culture of the organization. ... that structures and systems are needed to ensure that knowledge is captured and shared for use by entire organization.	... about the relative emphasis on single-loop or double-loop learning because of different views of leaders, industry factors, and an organization's maturity/life stage. ... about what information is needed by whom and for what purposes; technology's role; location of knowledge within individuals (expertise) or within systems (public sharing)
Systemic Thinking Capacity ... that people must think systemically about the impact of their decisions and work elsewhere in and on the system, and over time.	... about who needs this capacity (e.g., managers vs. shop floor) and the radius of systemic thinking out beyond the organization.
Greater Participation by Employees ... that people must participate more fully in work design and decision making and take more responsibility for both results and learning.	... about the extent and type of participation recommended for people at different levels or functions.

Culture and Structure of Learning

... that structures and cultures enable flexibility, open communication, "mistakes," cross-functional conversation, and minimal amounts of bureaucratic cross-checking.

... that metrics are reconceptualized so that they measure, support, and reward new kinds of desired learning.

... about the way in which cultures and structures should be designed, and the extent to which openness and flexibility can be maintained given industry type and purpose.

... about the focus and design of metrics, e.g., around learning vs. performance, collaboration and sharing, and manipulation of knowledge.

Selected Models of Practice

Peter Senge (1990) popularized a phenomenon that many were struggling to "name" when he wrote *The Fifth Discipline*. Senge's formula for creating the learning organization includes fostering personal mastery, helping teams learn together, creating shared vision, understanding mental models, and linking these components through systems thinking. He described a new kind of leader who is able to model and facilitate such learning. Many large manufacturing companies have worked with Senge and his associates through a learning laboratory to experiment with change initiatives that grow out of his model. Roth and Kleiner (2000), for example, document their use in the launch of a new car.

Senge describes the way in which the "pull" to a new future state enables creative tension that leads to innovation. Visioning the future also enables individuals to mesh their individual goals around a commonly agreed purpose. Arie deGeus, an early associate of Senge, takes an ecological view of systems learning that grows out of a 40-year career with Royal Dutch Shell. DeGeus (1997) identified characteristics of long-lived companies: a core sense of identity and values, tolerance of unconventional thinking and of experimentation, and a financial policy that shepherds resources to allow for flexibility. He also pioneered scenario planning, an approach to inventing the present by working backwards from descriptive, research-based prognoses of the future.

DiBella and Nevis (1998) point out that organizations have always learned and that it is better to enhance these preferences than to introduce new ones. However, most learning organization models, like Senge's, embody normative practices that their creators have identified through research, benchmarking of leading companies, and their own work. Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996), for example, identified core practices at the individual, group, and organizational levels: (1) creating continuous learning opportunities; (2) promoting inquiry and dialogue; (3) encouraging collaboration and team learning; (4) creating systems to capture and share learning; (5) empowering people toward a collective vision; (6) connecting the organization to its environment; and (7) providing strategic leadership for learning. Subsequent survey research with a diagnostic assessment tool has supported the links between these interventions and performance impact (Selden, Watkins, Valentine, and Marsick 1998; Yang, Watkins, and Marsick 1998). This model shares characteristics with that of Redding and Catalanello (1994) on speed, depth, and breadth of learning; and the thinking of Pedler, Burgoyne, and Boydell (1991) on how companies learn to sustain and develop themselves and their people over time.

Intellectual Capital and Knowledge Management

Organizational learning speaks to a dynamic process that is sometimes difficult to see or measure. A recent vein of literature speaks to the tangible outcomes of that process: knowledge as a product, its creation and management within the system, and its contribution to knowledge outcomes that are captured through the idea of intellectual capital.

Measures for intellectual capital grew out of dissatisfaction with conventional economic measures of value. Many of the assets brought to an organization today reside in intangibles that are the result of knowledge resident in people or systems and products that they create. In the manufacturing age, these intangibles were often identified as "good will." In today's knowledge era, intellectual capital is most frequently described as having three components (Stewart 1997; Sveiby 1997): human capital, structural capital, and customer capital. Human capital resides in the people who work in a system themselves with all of their knowledge, experience, and capacity to grow and innovate. Structural capital is what remains behind when people leave the premises: systems, policies, processes, tools, or intellectual property that become property of the system itself. Customer capital is the system of relationships that an organization has with its clients irrespective of the people who work there or the structural capital that is in place.

The intellectual property literature underpins the creation of "the balanced scorecard" (Kaplan and Norton 1996) that measures human, structural, and customer capital along with financial capital and tangible assets. The benefits of measurement are offset by a tendency to value only that which is measured, even though the literature on innovation that gave birth to the idea of intellectual capital touts the advantages of creativity that grows outside such boundaries. Measurements oriented to standardization ironically suppress the diversity they are intended to encourage.

Much of the literature on knowledge management is dominated by the design of information technology. People are encouraged to store what they know in electronic databases and share this information with others in the firm. Davenport and Prusak (1998) take a middle ground between design of technology and concern for the nature of what is communicated. However, knowledge management systems often fall into the trap of building technology to manage bits of data and information. Companies are surprised when people do not use these systems as a resource. Building a culture conducive to knowledge and learning is far more important than information storage, retrieval, and transfer.

For example, a nationwide survey by *Consultants News* of 82 consulting groups nationwide (Reimus 1997) showed that the consulting firms that create knowledge management systems are grappling with the same information technology challenges as are their clients. Some 60% of these firms did not maintain an active best practices database. One in three firms did not use groupware for collaboration. Less than 25% used the Internet for internal communication, and at least 25% believed that technology provided only a slight competitive advantage, at best. The biggest challenge in the use of technology was persuading consultants to collaborate and share knowledge. This was followed by the challenges of main-

taining the currency and usefulness of information; ensuring security and confidentiality of the database; and providing for consistency and timeliness of data management, storage, and retrieval.

Synthesizing Concepts

Although views on learning and knowledge creation vary, one can identify core features across them. In 1995, more than 20 researchers and practitioners who had developed models of the learning organization and diagnostic instruments joined in a discussion of their work under the auspices of the American Society for Training and Development. Gephart, Marsick, and Van Buren (1997) developed *The Learning Organization Assessment Framework* (LOAF) based on a review of the literature and an analysis of selected diagnostic instruments. Participants assessed their models against this framework. Essential components of LOAF were identified: levels of learning (individual, team, and organization); a set of facilitating organizational systems that support learning; and change management factors. Relevant facilitating systems center on these factors: vision and strategy; leadership and management; culture and structure; and practices related to communication, information and knowledge management, performance management and support, and the use of technology.

Scholars often caution against a one-size-fits-all approach to creating the learning organization. Experience suggests that these interventions involve complex, interactive changes among people and subsystems within a social unit. Organizational learning is like an intricately designed rug or wall hanging with many patterns in many colors. When threads are adjusted in one part of the fabric, they affect the composition, fit, and balance of the pattern in another part of the weave. It is not enough to install a checklist of practices that might work in one organization but do not fit with another. One needs to take a closer look at the nature of the learning process itself.

Organizational Learning Process

We begin with a view of organizational learning developed by Argyris and Schön (1978, 1996), who in turn drew on the work of John Dewey (1938) on learning from experience, and of Kurt Lewin (1935) on the interaction of people with their environments as they modify their behavior. Individuals inquire into issues on behalf of the organization. Their learning is fueled by doubt or some other mismatch between expectations and reality, and their goals and actions are often directed by unexamined values and beliefs that shape and limit their interpretation. When they are successful, people seldom look further into the links between actions and outcomes. The feedback they receive suggests they acted appropriately. But when results are not anticipated, then people are more likely to reflect on the causes of their errors. If they reflect on tactics without examining the original way in which they interpreted the challenge, they engage in what Argyris and Schön (1978, 1996) call single-loop learning. If they delve more deeply into the way their values, beliefs, and assumptions caused them to frame the problem, they may engage in double-loop learning. Single-loop learning typically leads to incremental changes; double-loop learning is more likely to lead to further questions that reframe one's understanding of the entire situation.

We adopt the view that reality is socially constructed (Schwandt 1994). As Mezirow (1991) suggests, people make meaning of situations they encounter by filtering new impressions through prior frames of reference that are influenced by society's collective understandings and norms. They reinterpret and sometimes call into question these viewpoints. They engage in what Karl Weick (1995) calls sensemaking to construct plausible explanations of surprises they encounter, often after the fact. Based on the work of George Herbert Mead (1934), among others, "Sensemaking is understood as a process that is (1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enactive of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, and (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy" (p. 17).

As Argyris and Schön (1996) point out, organizations are social constructions. People are appointed, or are otherwise "anointed" by followers, to act on behalf of a system. Under the right conditions, when they learn, they take their learning back to the system. Systems learning cannot occur unless the system as a whole is adequately prepared to absorb and use this learning so that it becomes shared, easily accessed, and productively employed in the service of the system's agreed-upon vision. People have no reason to collaborate unless they share a common purpose, which may be more or less explicit, that ties them together in a relatively committed and permanent fashion for the sake of common goals, and that enables them to develop shared rules for organizational life. DiBella and Nevis's (1998) differentiation of organizational from individual learning, then, succinctly summarizes its nature: "First, *new skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors are created or acquired over time.*. . . . Second, *what is learned becomes the property of some collective unit.* . . . Third, *what is learned remains within the organization or group even if individuals leave*" (pp. 25-26) [original italics].

Systems and Chaos Theory

Open systems and chaos theory help to further understanding of how organizational learning differs from individual learning. At the heart of open systems theory is the notion of feedback. Scientists discovered that systems could become self-regulating through feedback loops. Feedback loops can run counter to an original force, and thus be self-balancing; or they can lead to runaway feedback through self-reinforcing loops in the same direction. Feedback loops enable a system to self-organize, that is, communicate within, and thereby, learn from and correct mistakes, and reorganize itself so that it lives. According to Capra (1996), self-organizing systems have three key features:

1. Survival does not depend solely on the "requisite variety" of the system itself (p. 85). New structures and modes of behavior are constantly being created through development and learning. Life's tendency is to create novelty, and its innovations may or may not adapt to changing conditions.
2. Self-organizing occurs in open systems that are stable in their structure even though energy and matter are constantly flowing through them. New structures and behaviors can evolve when the system is at a point far from equilibrium.
3. Patterns of interaction within systems are not linear, and are highly interconnected. This characteristic leads Capra to describe systems using the metaphor of a "web of life."

Systems theory suggests that complexity increases as the unit of analysis grows larger–from a molecule to a cell to a tissue to an organ to an organism. Each higher level has properties because of its pattern of relationships that do not show up at a lower level.

Chaos theory shows that "random disturbances can produce unpredictable events and relationships that reverberate throughout a system, creating novel patterns of change…despite all of the unpredictability, coherent order *always* emerges out of the randomness and surface chaos (Morgan 1997, p. 262). Chaos theory helps to understand what happens when systems move so far from equilibrium that they become "structurally unstable" at critical "bifurcation points…in the system's evolution where a fork suddenly appears and the system branches off in a new direction" (Capra 1996, p. 136). At critical points of instability far from equilibrium, new forms of organization can evolve due to amplifying runaway feedback loops that catapult the system in new directions. The new form that a system will take at bifurcation points cannot be predicted:

> At the bifurcation point the system can "choose"–the term is used metaphorically–from among several possible paths, or states. Which path it will take will depend on the system's history and on various external conditions and can never be predicted. There is an irreducible random element at each bifurcation point. (Capra 1996, p. 183)

Open systems and chaos theory are derived from the biological and physical sciences and cannot be applied literally to human systems. But many theorists draw on these theories to explain learning, complexity, and interactivity in organizations. Self-organization is driven by feedback loops. Human systems also experience feedback through language and patterns of symbolic communication. Human systems involve interactive patterns of relationships. In the open systems model, the learning of one person or group affects that of others; they are mutually interdependent.

Chaotic change is enhanced by a move in organizations to decentralize so that people and units can more easily respond to flux in the environment. Knowledge can be freely accessed in organizations that reflect a chaos model, but at the same time, the individual can count on less help from the system in choosing and weighing the ideas that might be of greatest value to an unpredictable future. Control gives way to emergent design. People must be trusted to act on their best judgment, even if consequences are not fully predictable; people learn from what they do, assess outcomes, and adjust their course in alignment with a common vision.

Foci for Enhancing Organizational Learning

Three interactive foci can be identified from this discussion for enhancing organizational learning. First, critical reflection can provide people and systems with the ability to enhance what is an otherwise tacit, experiential learning process. Second, collaboration can provide avenues for building joint knowledge. Third,

communication provides for feedback loops across the system. Many conditions affect the ability of an organization to learn. One that stands out is the quality of the organization's social capital.

Critical Reflection

The heart of organizational learning is a collective process of learning from experience. Learning from experience may be tacit or not highly conscious (Polanyi 1967) and acquired primarily through trial and error, observation, modeling, and socialization. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe this process as situated learning or legitimate peripheral participation. The tacit nature of experiential learning can dilute or distort lessons learned. People may not recognize what they know and they may not fully understand the reasons for success or failure. They also become blind to points of view that fall outside their value system and perspective. Making learning explicit helps people to recognize and analyze experience. Marsick and Volpe's (1999) review of informal learning studies suggests that learning is enhanced through conscious attention to goals and turning points, awareness of disjunctures and triggers for change in the environment, an inductive mindset, and reflective skills.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) describe an interactive, spiral, iterative process of organizational learning that balances tacit and explicit knowing. Through socialization, tacit knowledge is created through sharing of experiences, mental models, and skills. Knowledge is then drawn out and made explicit so that ideas can be built into archetypes, and tested through new product development. New ideas are explicitly shared throughout the organization, across levels and other boundaries, so that they can be externalized and experimented with in other parts of the company. Finally, the newly evolved ideas are again internalized so that they become resocialized.

Learning is deeper when people question underlying values and assumptions that distort their understanding (Brookfield 1991; Cranton 1994; Mezirow 1991). Argyris and Schön (1978, 1996) help people analyze their tacit experience using a critical incident case analysis process. People are helped to uncover tacit assumptions and to map the way these beliefs have unconsciously influenced actions and results. They use double-loop learning to redesign their actions and practice skills of inquiry.

Critical reflection can transform people and organizations, but it is not common in the workplace. The process itself demands that people work from a model of free and informed choice and that they are able to engage in dialogue with one another regardless of status or position in the hierarchy. Individuals may not think in ways that enable them to raise these kinds of questions (Kegan 1994). Even when they do, organizations are not typically safe places for public critique even when they have adopted a commitment to organizational learning. As the work of Argyris and Schön (1996) over the years attests, some leaders have begun to create cultures that are more open to critical thinking, but organizational life, by its very nature, often pushes members toward conformity. The expression of

differences feeds opportunities for critical questioning, yet true and full valuing of diversity is still a challenge in organizational life (Thomas 1999).

Collaboration

Learning cannot be collectively owned unless knowledge is shared. Research on group learning (Imel 1996) helps to explain collaborative dynamics that have been researched elsewhere by social psychologists (Johnson and Johnson 1994, 2000). Kasl, Marsick, and Dechant (1997) and Brooks (1994) have studied the dynamics of group learning. They found that individuals cross boundaries to gather new ideas, information, and mental models that they bring into a group. Members, who enter the engagement with an original frame of reference, can use these new perspectives to challenge their original viewpoints, which leads to reframing by individuals, subgroups, or the entire group. Reframing can focus on content or tasks, on the way in which members solve problems, or on the basic premises that underlie their definition of the situation. Reframing typically leads to experimentation and trial and error. Through an iterative cycle, the group makes sense of the challenge by integrating perspectives, which leads to mutual construction of new knowledge. This research also identified conditions within the group that affect its ability to learn and conditions within the organization that influence whether or not group learning leads to organizational learning. The ability of groups to collaborate is clearly affected by power dynamics and the culture of the organization. These group learning models have been validated in other studies (Carkhuff 1999; Gavan 1996; John 1995; Oxford 1998).

Collaborative dynamics are at the heart of several "action technologies" (Brooks and Watkins 1994): action research, action learning, action science, action inquiry and collaborative inquiry. Articles in a recent special edition of ***Management Learning*** edited by Raelin (1999) describe similarities and differences among these approaches. Action technologies have roots in theories of social interdependence, participatory research and decision making, and democracy even though the environments in which they are practiced may be controlling, hierarchical, and nonparticipatory in nature. Each approach has its own body of research, although many studies are fugitive research done in action settings but not published in journals. Interventions are typically focused on data-based action rather than theory generation.

Action technologies advocate experimentation that is social, learning based, and iterative. Whatever the unique features of each approach, people always get together in groups to address real challenges. They collect information about the challenge and intervene to resolve it. They might apply their learning primarily to their own experience, or they might intervene in systems. They monitor results and bring these results back to the group for further reflection and experimentation. All of these approaches involve reflection and action, learning from experience, and the use of strategies that help people to become more aware of the way in which they think and draw inferences. These approaches can engage people in deeper analysis of their own biography and the assumptions that cause them to think and act as they habitually do. Learning does not always become organizational in nature, even when this is the intent (Yorks et al. 1998).

Communication

Communication is the lifeblood of organizational learning. However, its quality may be far more important than how much of it occurs. Concerns about communication often point to a host of deeper problems, such as unsatisfactory relationships among people, barriers around gender or race, or the inability to identify and resolve conflicting points of view. "Silos" created by reporting lines make it difficult to reach the right people at the right time. Technology makes information transmission easy, but it also makes it hard to judge accuracy and sort through volume. Commenting on the latter, Robert Johansen, President of the Institute for the Future, noted at a seminar at the Columbia Business School that the future will be decided by *ignorance management* rather than *knowledge management*: making choices about what information should simply be ignored.

Systems and chaos theory points to the need for effective communication processes and systems in order to provide frequent, high-quality feedback: both general feedback from the changing environment and specific feedback among people. The success of organizational learning turns on the ability of people to communicate with others about the meaning of clues in the environment. Constructivist communication involves opportunities for meaning making and sensemaking (Weick 1995). Whether talking via technology or in person, people need skills and freedom to engage freely in critical inquiry and to welcome divergent views that can help them to see how their understanding is incomplete or inaccurate. However, the culture of most org nizations, and the societies in which they function, lead people to fear open testing of their ideas and to find themselves punished when they inevitably make mistakes.

Feedback is key to individual learning, but it is also critical for learning across levels within organizations (Crossan, Lane, and White 1999). Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) model reflects the centrality of frequent, frank and open feedback, much of which takes place in cross-functional, cross-level groups created specifically for the purpose of innovation and knowledge creation.

Social Capital

People are not likely to critically reflect, collaborate, and communicate without a modicum of trust. Social capital theory provides a theoretical base from which to understand this. Fukuyama (1999) defines social capital as follows:

> A set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permits cooperation among them. If members of the group come to expect that others will behave reliably and honestly, then they will come to trust one another. Trust is like a lubricant that makes the running of any group or organization more efficient. (p. 16)

Social capital can be used for destructive or constructive purposes. All groups have social capital, but they differ in their "the radius of trust" (ibid., p. 17), that is, the range of people who can be trusted as one moves out from the family toward social units in which people participate voluntarily or by reason of birth.

Loyalty to the family usually prevails over loyalty to other groups. The radius of trust differs by the nature of the social group as well as the sociocultural context.

Organizational learning functions best when the system is built upon a strong base of positive social capital. Ideally, both individuals and the system benefit from mutual learning. However, the integration of what individuals know into a collective whole involves negotiation of mutual interests. Inevitably, conflicts arise over different points of view. Power dynamics often supercede the full consideration of different points of view.

As has been argued by many critics of today's workplace, organizations may not merit a high degree of trust. Rapid change has unfrozen the bonds of loyalty and refashioned the social contract in the workplace (Rifkin 1995). On the one hand, change has freed some people to take advantage of many new opportunities. But opportunity privileges some groups and not others (Hake 1999). Welton (1995) describes the way in which oppressive forces in institutions impinge on the lifeworld of individuals. Sennett (1998) revisits research conducted a quarter of a century ago with Jonathan Cobb about working-class Americans. He reflects on the way in which the new capitalism makes it difficult for employees to create a meaningful narrative of their lives around work. Brooks (1994), Schied et al. (1997), Darrah (1995, 1996), and Garrick (1998) have uncovered dynamics of exploitation in their research in organizations. Power dynamics have shifted in favor of those with knowledge capital, but power dynamics will never be eliminated from the workplace. If anything, the uncertainty that accompanies rapid change has intensified the political nature of organizational life.

Facilitating Learning for the Organization as a System

The goals that individuals might have for themselves are seldom fully consistent with the needs of the organization. Adult educators must therefore think through the conflicts that are inherent in their role because they *do* serve two masters: the individuals who comprise the organization, each of whom has his/her own needs; and the system as a whole, which *cannot* logically meet everyone's need and therefore must engage in negotiation of interests. Adult educators can work with both constituencies, though conflicts do occur and they may need to work differently with either individuals or the organization as a whole. To what should adult educators attend as they help systems learn? The literature reviewed here suggests that the adult educator attend to the environment, to choice, and to culture and systems in organizations.

Attending to Environment

Much of what occurs when a system is far from equilibrium is due to random chance. Runaway feedback loops send rapid signals in many directions. At this point, it is difficult to predict which environmental factors will influence the direction that the system will take. "A tiny random fluctuation, often called 'noise,' can induce the choice of path" (Capra 1996, p. 191). Greater attention to the environment will provide clues to where one can influence systems change.

The rapidly changing environment is both the container for learning and often the stimulus for learning. Individuals make sense of the changing environment on behalf of the system and act on their interpretations. Learning happens when the system is helped to reflect on its interpretations and actions, draw conclusions, and use these conclusions to guide next steps.

Adult educators can play a central role in this kind of learning by identifying and working selectively with people who learn on behalf of the system. This includes people in power, although as chaos theory suggests, people have knowledge throughout different levels of the organization. Effective leaders of learning organizations know how to tap into this knowledge and engage people in change regardless of their level in the hierarchy. Adult educators can advocate for bringing people with diverse views more fully into decision making and knowledge generation.

Action technologies are an effective tool for engaging the entire system in learning. Many tools used in action technologies can be integrated into regular work practices. Action scientists, for example, help people to examine their ladders of inference for faulty assumptions, to map the links between assumptions and actions and outcomes, and to see the systemic consequences of their behavior (Argyris and Schön 1978, 1996; Marsick and Watkins 1999; Watkins and Marsick 1993). Strategies developed by Fisher and Torbert (1995) teach skills for examining one's thinking and communication patterns through action inquiry. Action learning can foster reflective learning and critical questioning (Yorks, O'Neil, and Marsick 1999). Collaborative inquiry helps people to develop capabilities around dialogue and shared inquiry (Bray et al. 2000; Reason 1994).

Attending to Choice

Choices around learning and change do exist, though they are not necessarily highly conscious and we do not always have full control over them. As Capra (1996) has identified, current "choices" are likely to be influenced by past choices, or our personal and social life history. Adult educators can help individuals and systems choose to reflect consciously, and sometimes critically, on feedback in light of past experience and present or future direction.

Adult educators need to create safe laboratories within which people, individually and collectively, can critically examine personal habits and choices. One-on-one coaching provides this kind of safety. Educators who have worked with action technologies have devised strategies for working with people in groups to examine past experience and choices. They balance respect for privacy and personal control of learning with the value gained when a larger group of people share more deeply about their experience. A good example is the organizational life history (Roth and Kleiner 2000) in which interventionists help people and groups depict and critically analyze the dynamics of change that they undergo during specific challenges or crises. Senge and his colleagues have identified many tools that can be used in helping people examine assumptions that underlie individual and collective choices (Senge et al. 1994, 1999). Mezirow and Associates (1990) and Cranton (1994) have identified strategies for transformative learning that can likewise be helpful in this regard.

Attending to the Organization

The biggest barrier to using new learning in the system is a resistant organizational culture. People feel they cannot openly discuss variant views, challenge others, communicate across boundaries, take risks, and share knowledge without being penalized in some way. Cultures do not change overnight, but they can be moved in new directions, practice by practice. Culture change involves examination of values and beliefs and new ways of acting that are reinforced by changes in rewards and recognition, learning practices, and performance support. Learning organization interventions often begin with a few simple steps that are strategically placed and aligned with organizational priorities (Marsick and Watkins 1999; Watkins and Marsick 1993, 1996). The biggest gains come when leaders themselves model tolerance for diverse views, willingness to take risks, and other learning practices.

Adult educators may not have access to top leadership in organizations, and as a result, often find it easier to intervene around learning and development practices. They help organizations clarify valued capabilities, provide tools and methods so that individuals can assess themselves against these needs, and lobby for access to resources. Resources include time, money, learning options, and the attention of other people in the organization who can provide feedback and share their expertise. If a person is to engage in continuous learning, the organization then needs to provide appropriate incentives and rewards, link the new learning to work, and support efforts to use the learning to make changes elsewhere in the organization (Marsick and Watkins 1999).

Action technologies can be used to engage the entire system in change. Space does not permit an elaborate discussion of the design of these strategies, but they share characteristics of chaos and systems theory in that multiple stakeholders are engaged with others in the solution of real problems. Many new roles emerge for the adult educator in these kinds of interventions. For example, O'Neil identified characteristics of the new role of the Learning Coach in action learning interventions based on observation and interviews with coaches in the United States, England, and Sweden (Yorks, O'Neil, and Marsick 1999). Learning Coaches are skilled at group dynamics, understand organizational dynamics, and frame their work using systems thinking. They have keen powers of observation and are skilled at giving feedback and asking deep questions that stimulate further thinking. They help individuals and the group learn from the task at hand through discovery, experimentation, and reflection on their experiences.

Facilitating Learning for the Individuals in the System

Organizational literature makes it clear that individual learning alone is not enough to effect learning across the system. Yet Senge's (1990) evocation of the excitement of personal mastery may well have generated enthusiasm for the broader concept. Organizations can not learn unless people notice, use, and share ideas, practices, and thinking of others. Organizations increasingly benefit when individuals are encouraged and supported in a wide range of learning opportunities (Marsick and Watkins 1999; Watkins and Marsick 1993, 1996). The instru-

mental rationale for this position is echoed in the logic that Johnsonville Foods used when they began their learning journey. Ralph Stayer, then the President of Johnsonville Foods, and Linda Honold, an internal organizational development consultant, assumed that people would take their learning habits to work. They believed that increased appreciation for personal learning releases a wealth of energy and innovative ideas.

However, even though organizations increasingly encourage autonomy around work and learning, managers make decisions that often limit a person's freedom to develop and to share knowledge. If individuals find this to be unnecessarily or unbearably exploitative–and it can become so–their choices are to find employment elsewhere, or to work from within, perhaps jointly with others through unions, to make changes in the social contract.

Meshing Individual and Organizational Learning

Adult educators can help individuals mesh their learning with that of the entire system. The literature on group learning and action technologies describe ways in which the individual can cross boundaries to gather fresh perspectives and challenge their own and one another's thinking in light of new information. People can be helped to probe assumptions they individually hold or have bought into through what is often known as groupthink (Janis 1982). Dialogue and inquiry skills developed in action science enhance an individual's ability to check whether others hold the views they assume to be true (Dixon 1996; Marsick and Watkins 1999; Watkins and Marsick 1993). Conflict needs to be brought to the surface and effectively managed so that the merits of alternative views can be considered.

Adult educators can also help individuals to test the waters around safety in the group and in the organization before plunging into actions that might ultimately harm them. Despite assertions to the contrary, organizations of any kind seldom welcome everyone's ideas equally or enthusiastically. Although the learning organization does encourage individuals to challenge the system, it also shows that cultures are often not ready to embrace such challenge. Adult educators must work skillfully and wisely with people to make sound decisions about their challenges.

As Sennett (1998) points out, individuals need help in making sense of the rapidly changing environment and in creating a narrative about their work lives that is meaningful to them. Organizations are not likely to take up this mandate; they expect people to do this on their own time, and at least in this point in history, have little investment in retaining employees over long periods of time. Organizations let people go or encourage them to leave when they burn out or cannot, for whatever reason, update their skills as demanded. Some people may turn to personal development workshops for assistance, but many do not have access to these or have not thought about themselves as in need of such help. Adult educators can play a key role in developing approaches to helping people rethink the meaning of their lives. One effective strategy is the use of life history to help people review and rethink their experiences (Dominice 1990).

Summary

This chapter synthesizes literature on learning organizations. Individuals and groups learn, and when conditions and systems are well designed, their learning can be shared across the organization and incorporated into its practices, beliefs, policies, structure and culture. Organizational learning is a dynamic process through which people co-construct knowledge. Chaos theory emphasizes the opening up of the system to innovation during turbulent times (Capra 1996). Greater awareness and attention to the environment provides clues to sensemaking. Even though people, individually and collectively, pay more attention to the environment, they may not have the time, capability or resources for systematic consideration of what they are taking in and how they are processing it. Chaos theory recognizes that past history often decides future directions unless there is an intervention, whether random or planned, that shifts the focus of change. Greater understanding of self, and the way in which assumptions influence choices and decisions, assists in interpretation of the environment. Communication makes it easier to give and receive feedback. Collaboration fosters sharing of knowledge across boundaries. Adult educators can help people to manage and direct systems-level learning more consciously, even though organizations are not always designed to support critical inquiry by everyone in the system. They can focus on points of sensitivity for the individual and the organization related to meaning making and to the design of both individual and systems learning.

Finally, as Hake (1999) advises, adult educators need to be advocates for those individuals who fall between the cracks as opportunities open for some people but close more rapidly for others. Adult educators can advocate for policy and legislation to address these gaps. In today's global environment, the field needs activists who counteract the ability of global companies to make policies *de facto* across the boundaries of nation states.

Several key questions remain. How can educators remain aware of the larger societal context for organizational learning? Do they raise questions in organizations when they find that people are unfairly treated? And how do they develop their own capacity and perspective as they work with large social change projects? Some of these questions are further explored in the next chapter.

Learning Communities

by Jeanne Bitternan

In Europe and the United States, people increasingly and spontaneously seek out one another through virtual and face-to-face means in order to satisfy self-identified needs around recreational activities, sports and crafts, health advocacy, or survivor, spiritual, and consumer interests. The rise of so many groups provides the individual with an almost staggering potential for multiple identification. Almost everyone participates in many learning communities: natural groups of people drawn together by mutual interests that often cross socioeconomic, cultural, functional or organizational boundaries. The learning community literature is vast, sometimes elusive, and hard to synthesize. In today's postmodern world, questions can be raised about the meaning of community given the break up of unifying belief systems and the rise of individual meaning systems that are not explained by meta-narratives (St. Clair 1998). This chapter speaks to the nature of a learning community, the way in which people learn and communicate in such groups, and critical assessment of information that is gained in such communities. The chapter's focus is primarily on communities formed by lifestyle choices.

The Learning Community

Learning communities cross the boundaries of other social units formed by geographic proximity, family relation, work, and politics or citizenship. These communities grow out of a variety of interests: personal projects, family of choice, spiritual or religious affinity, recreational interests, health awareness, professional affinity, and other support and advocacy interest groups. Despite an ERIC search of "more than 200 articles published since 1990 which address community in adult education," St. Clair (1998) found that authors do not agree on the meaning of community, all the more so because of "postmodern perspectives" on "identity" and the "collective" (p. 5). St. Clair ultimately conceptualizes community as relationships–the "interpersonal aspects" of "grouped individuals" (p. 8). Learning communities are often voluntary although their formation may be influenced by inherited characteristics related to birth and family of origin, such as gender, race, class, personality, nationality, or talents. People move among multiple communities in which they simultaneously participate. Learning communities are shaped by their members, but these communities reciprocally influence the identity, growth and learning of members. St. Clair depicts the learning community as a "sociocultural" phenomenon; it is the "site of cultural production and reproduction" (ibid., p. 8) These communities are discursive: "discourse acts through communities to shape culture" (ibid., p. 9).

Many learning communities are driven by "lifestyle" choices. As people pursue their interests, they typically learn informally through individual and mutual experiences. The continuous "consumption" of experience provides both an orientation towards life and a "means of expressing identity" (Usher, Bryant, and Johnston 1997, p. 107). The identity of members and of the group is constantly

changing as people gain new insights from their activities. Such learning can help to cultivate personal autonomy, but the community also develops social norms that can reciprocally, and often subtly, influence identity development. Autonomy then becomes a "life-project" in which there is ongoing construction and reconstruction of identity through the trying-or of relationships. Participation in these communities can lead to empowerment, but this is not a foregone conclusion. Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) note that "lifestyle practices" enable subjects to actively create "themselves, free from constraining traditions and ideologies." However, individuals are also "positioned as passive subjects, since lifestyle is socially defined, culturally legitimized, economically influenced and prey to consumerism and media-generated images" (p. 110). Participation in community, therefore, evokes an ongoing dialectic between individual identity and socialization into the group.

Theory and Models of Sociocultural Learning

Models of learning that take into account the sociocultural construction of understanding help to explain the experiential learning process in these communities. Many adult education models in the United States have focused on the individual as self-directed and individually autonomous. A few models, by contrast, describe learning as co-constructed with others in the social context. Co-constructed learning is conceptualized as socially interactive, interconnected, and nonlinear. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) provide an example in a model developed by Hammond and Collins in which individuals are charged with–

> building a cooperative learning climate, analyzing and reflecting on themselves and the social economic and political contexts in which they are situated, generating competency profiles for themselves, diagnosing their learning needs within the framework of both the personal and social context, formulating socially and personally relevant learning goals that result in learning agreements, implementing and managing their learning, and then reflecting on and evaluating their learning. (p. 305)

This model incorporates a critical perspective that weds development of the individual or personal with that of the social. The process that underlies such learning involves the social construction of meaning and action. Social learning theory further illuminates this process.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory was developed from foundations in both behaviorism and cognitive thinking (Merriam and Caffarella 1999). Unlike its precursors, it focused attention on both the role of observation (including perceiving, attending and noticing) and on reinforcement through feedback from the setting in which learning occurred. The theory suggests that as individuals grow and learn in a culture, they continually observe phenomena in their environment. With Bandura's (1976, 1977) work came the recognition that learning from experience can be both primary or "vicarious"; in other words, learning can occur "through

observation of other people's behavior and its consequences" (p. 392). Bandura postulated that such observational or modeling processes are distinguishable by their "self-regulatory" nature; individuals "can regulate their own behavior to some extent by visualizing self-generated consequences" (p. 392).

Through observation a person comes to recognize a pattern, remember it, proceed through some rehearsal, and be motivated to draw upon it. One becomes engaged in self-comparison against a cognitive mental model, as well as in self-assessment of one's own performance. This endless interactive process suggests that people continuously influence their environments and are simultaneously influenced by them. In order to learn, a person must be convinced that problems or situations can be resolved positively; that is, that the potential for personal mastery exists and that environments can be influenced. Bandura (1986) develops this position as self-efficacy theory. By extension, therefore, social learning theory suggests that development of the capacity for self-mastery and a sense of empowerment emerges from modeling or observing others with these capabilities. Self-efficacy leads to coping behaviors, understanding others, communicating, learning new skills, and dealing effectively with life's challenges.

Bandura's discussion of the interactive process of observational learning has contributed greatly to theories of adult learning that focus on developing social roles through the utilization of modeling and mentoring (Merriam and Caffarella 1999). People learn in this way through reflection on their interaction with others and on their environment.

Disjuncture and Reflection

Another socioculturally oriented model has been developed by Jarvis (1987, 1992, 1999) who draws from the work of John Dewey (1938) and George Herbert Mead (1934). In early research, Jarvis identified limits to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. Kolb suggested that differences in learning style can be characterized by preferences for the way in which people take in experience–by concrete experience or abstract conceptualization–and the way in which they process and draw conclusions from these experiences–reflective observation or active experimentation. Jarvis was able to draw out a more multifaceted, multidirectional model by asking people to reflect on their own learning in relationship to Kolb's well-recognized experiential learning cycle.

We share with Jarvis a belief that much learning is triggered by what Dewey (1938) called disjunctures. Disjuncture is experienced as a "lack of harmony" between people and their social world in which individuals become aware that their "stock of knowledge" (their biographies) are inadequate to deal with their "action experience" (Jarvis 1987, p. 82). Jarvis suggests that awareness of interests shapes people's experiences. Disjuncture becomes apparent when people compare their "biography (subjective assessment of what is known, what is of interest, or what is needed) and the experience (perception of what is required–either of the subject or that of the other involved in the interaction" (ibid., p. 94).

When the reflective process stimulated by disjuncture helps people to deeply question their understanding of the situation, they may become liberated from

what Paulo Freire (1997) calls "false perception" or consciousness (p. 34). People develop interests and needs through participation in society. They internalize social norms that become taken for granted and uncritically used for action. By talking together about disjuncture and collectively exploring the meaning they have together created, they can reformulate incomplete or inaccurate understandings of their social milieu. Such learning is generative in that it helps individuals and groups to transcend their understanding of social environments and the culturally constructed view of truth and meaning. In so doing unanticipated forms of knowing and learning may emerge.

Finally, Jarvis argues that it is only in "open relationship with other people that reflective learning and authenticity can be fostered." People learn to be "persons in interaction" (Jarvis 1992, p. 118). Recently, Jarvis (1999) writes even more emphatically about the dialectical relationship between individuals and their experiential world. He indicates that "it is not possible to isolate experiences and actions from social pressures that surround the situation, so action is rarely free from some considerations about these forces" (p. 65).

Situated Cognition and Communities of Practice

Recent theories of situated cognition or legitimate peripheral participation bring the social construction of experience fully into focus (Brown, Collins, and Duguid 1989; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger and Snyder 2000). These theories show that learning happens in context as people address challenges and problems. Learning is often unconscious and tacit (Polanyi 1967). People take their cues for understanding as they act through interaction with other people, use of tools, and awareness of the physical environment. Sylvia Scribner's (1986) classic analysis of the dairy as a social learning system illustrates these points. She showed how workers calculated volumes, weights, and costs in practical, sense-based ways. For example, product assemblers filled the same order differently based on the size of available containers and the degree to which these containers were already full. They made quick judgments about how to fill cases with the least amount of effort, and as a result, they did not use formal math calculations. Drivers priced their orders based on the size and fill rate of milk cases rather than by using standard multiplication procedures. Scribner concluded that people learned holistically through the use of all five senses. Situated cognition thus draws on people's thoughts, feelings, hunches, and physical movements. People can be helped to learn more effectively when tacit processes are made explicit and they are helped to model and practice new capabilities through cognitive apprenticeships.

Situated cognition can be enhanced through engagement in communities of practice, that is, informal associations of people who connect as they pursue mutual interests. Learning occurs through both discrete activities and social communities. Collective learning is assumed to happen organically in accordance with many of the principles of chaos theory (Capra 1996). All tasks, skills, and mastery are related to larger systems of relationships in which meanings are derived and competencies are developed. An individual not only is "defined by" these relations but further "defines these relations" (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.

53). Learning is situated through a "long-term, living relation, between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice. Thus identity, knowing and social membership, entail one another" (ibid.).

People are perennially involved in "situated negotiation and renegotiation of meanings" as they work with others through multiple and sometimes conflicting memberships (Lave and Wenger 1991, p. 51). As Lave and Wenger point out, the social reproduction of communities of practice involves tension between processes that support learning for the generative production of a social future and processes that seek to maintain the status quo. Inevitably, disharmony arises between experienced practitioners and newcomers or novices because their needs and interests greatly differ. Legitimate peripheral participation can threaten to displace old-timers, the well versed, and thus the continuity of traditional practice.

Wenger (1998) holds that engagement in social practice is the central method by which learning takes place. As people participate in community, they evolve common understandings and are socialized into the group. Learning involves four components: "meaning (learning as experience), identity (learning as becoming), practice (learning as doing) and community (learning as belonging)" (p. 5). Individuals learn as they contribute to these communities while the community learns by redefining practices based on member contributions. Members may choose to reject the communities in which they have been socialized. For communities to survive individuals and groups must learn: to "engage" and develop relationships; to "align engagements"; to define interests and resolve or reconcile differing interpretations about meanings; and to develop expanded repertoires for discursive activity (p. 95).

Wenger and Snyder (2000) describe "communities of practice" as "organic, spontaneous, and informal" albeit "resistant to supervision and interference" (p.140). They recommend that organizations cultivate these natural communities because of their potential for generating new ideas and solutions to commonplace problems. In their advocacy, however, these authors do not acknowledge a potential threat posed by proliferation of these groups. Their organic nature, along with the likelihood that people will participate simultaneously in multiple communities, generates an unpredictable quality in these communities. Although they hold potential for generating unanticipated benefits, they can also jeopardize stability. Individual participants, along with emergent subgroup cultures, determine both the parameters for membership and group direction. Direction and group-defined rules for participation may be at variance with those espoused by the organization. Top-down support is needed in organizations for these communities to thrive, but at the same time, these groups may actually undermine or defy established order and control.

Learning Challenges

People often participate in several communities of practice, some of which overlap. Multiple memberships may lead to conflicts. Wenger (1998) speaks of the "nexus of multimemberships"–the issue of reconciling the many communities and trajectories of participation in which we engage. Participation in learning commu-

nities casts educators into a complex relationship with both learners and the community, given that educators may find themselves co-creating communities to which they also belong. According to St. Clair (1998), "The community relationships of both the learners and the educator are essential supports to their identity, and the differences between the perspectives embedded in these relationships do not need to be treated as problems to be solved" (p. 11). Difference can lead to enriched new views.

However, we observe that people often do not have the capacity to resolve these differences. Members need to work through the intricacies of potentially competing affiliations. They need to understand and address differences around vision, purpose, rules and norms of interaction, and role conflicts. Negotiations need to be revisited periodically given that members come and go with some frequency. Continuous learning goals may be likewise set, and even monitored, as members clarify areas of common interest or circumscribed need. Negotiations provide for recognition of the inevitability and value of diversity. Identity development also becomes more consciously explicit as people work through multimemberships and simultaneously try to maintain coherence across boundaries (Wenger 1998).

Challenges arise as individuals seek to maintain identity and to be more responsible (ethical), effective (competent and cooperative), and autonomous (inter- and independent) within these communities. People have different abilities and propensities for engagement in learning communities. Hake (1999) addresses these very challenges in examining what is needed for lifelong learning in today's society. He suggests that individuals develop "reflexive biographical competency," that is, "intentional" learning skills to strategically deal with the profusion of passages or shifts that accompany contemporary life (p. 86). Hake thinks we need to know more about how educational biographies and learning settings can enhance the individual's (or social unit's) ability to "'learn to live a life' in changing and uncertain times" (p. 87). He conceptualizes such learning as a dynamic process of appropriation, utilization, understanding, and communication of information and skills in all forms of social interaction.

The nature of "learning to live" and "learning to participate with others" draws attention to different understandings of what it means to live "a good life" or a *meaningful* one. According to Ruark (1999), the term itself implies "social and civic well being" (p. 12). Learners, individually and within communities, need to question beliefs about what a good life means. Their questions might address ways in which meaningful living is more than economic productivity and employability; ways in which "adults know and make sense of their world"; and ways in which the individual comes to understand knowledge, the self, and social responsibility (ibid., p. 13). Social responsibility can include a focus on the improvement of society. Education and learning are also sought out for the intentional purpose of "becoming." How one comes to define what one should "become" is a critical challenge (Lankshear and McLaren 1993; Welton 1995).

In light of this, educators are challenged to reformulate their role with respect to individual and group learning. Their role can be thought of in a tripartite way. First, the educator might assist the learner in developing communicative competence for effective participation in the group (real or virtual). Second, the educa-

tor might aid in developing the learner's self-awareness with respect to learning to learn. This includes developing biographical competencies. Third, the educator can assist learners in developing their information access and networking skills. This includes assessing validity (critical thinking), finding and creating distance learning opportunities, and developing creativity. These roles are discussed in the next section.

Developing the Community: Group Learning and Communicative Competencies

In citing Johnson and Johnson (1994), Wlodkowski (1999) attests to the value of collaborative groups and cooperative learning. Benefits derive from social supports especially when members are working on complex problems for which there are no easy answers. Learners are more likely to take risks in developing their competencies in these groups. They are more likely to gain greater individual "achievement"; to "discover" personal voice, to be held "accountable" for learning new "skills," and for "acquiring new attitudes," and for developing a "shared identity with other group members" (Wlodkowski 1999, p. 105). Although the advantages to group learning are unequivocal, some tensions are also likely to emerge. Learning communities benefit when tensions and differences are brought up and addressed, which calls for critical reflection.

Critical Reflection

Cranton (1996) uses Mezirow's (1991) differentiation of learning as instrumental, communicative, or emancipatory to understand learning groups. Cranton highlights the task focus of instrumental learning, the process and relationships focus of communicative learning, and the self-reflective focus of emancipatory learning. The cooperative group is task focused, and as such, is highly structured and less attendant to process. The collaborative group is more social in nature. Educators in these groups are less controlling and more involved in joint inquiry that results in communicative awareness. In the transformative group members engage in critical reflection by examining assumptions that might distort their perceptions. This group's goal is more likely to be empowerment, and its outcome is emancipatory in nature. Mezirow (1997) suggests that transformative learning takes place through discourse in which, ideally, members "have full information; are free from coercion; have equal opportunity to assume the various roles of discourse . . .; become critically reflective of assumptions; are empathic and open to other perspectives; are willing to listen and to search for common ground or a synthesis of different points of view; and can make a tentative best judgment to guide action" (p. 10).

Portnow et al. (1998) draw on adult development literature (Kegan 1994) to distinguish between informational and transformational learning. The latter enables learners and their community to ponder critically not only the veracity of "facts" but the bias and intentions of those "creating the facts" (p. 22). In this conceptualization the nature of the learning group is not of primary significance; rather it is the individual's understanding of the group as helpful to the development of "decision-making, interpersonal, lifelong learning and communication

skills" (p. 23). The educator's role is to assist individuals in social units to embrace critical maxims. These maxims include the following:

- Diversity of perspectives can be brought together to work for a "common purpose."
- There may not be one "best path"–each alternative has benefits and liabilities.
- Cooperative processes must guarantee that all voices are heard.
- Challenging one's own assumptions serves to broaden perspectives and stimulate new vision.
- Communication of feelings and perspectives in a larger group serves to deepen understanding of complexities of all positions. (ibid., p. 26)

In any group there is potential for incompatibilities and exclusion. Critical reflection on issues that arise can increase individual and group learning. People vary in their abilities to engage in discursive community. They assess their own and others' capabilities as they work together. Further, irrespective of their capabilities, the ideal conditions for discourse are rarely found. Learning communities are fraught with personality differences, disparate distributions of power, and degrees of social influence.

As Cervero and Wilson (1999) indicate, it is naive for facilitators to seek primarily to maximize individual autonomy. Learning involves juggling multiple membership demands, different group norms, varying task orientations, and the various ways in which the facilitator is situated in the context. The learning community is always subject to differing degrees of privilege and power, both internally and externally. Cervero and Wilson suggest that education is political and that the educator above all must provide a "social vision" in practice. This vision does not preclude the individual's development, but situates it in the context of the learning community and situates that group within the larger society. Individual empowerment and self-authorship are considered as a collective possibility.

Communicative Competencies and Collaboration

Over the last decade, a specialization focus or "expert" mode phenomenon has emerged with respect to group work. We conclude that this expert focus is not enough if the community wishes to fully engage its members and find ways to co-construct knowledge through the process.

Gladding (1999) notes that both the American Psychological Association and the American Society for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) have advocated professional standards for those working with groups. They extended the idea of group work facilitation beyond groups constituted for psychoeducational issues (counseling, psychotherapeutic and personality reconstruction) to groups centered on task, work, and special learning interests. This notion of core competencies highlights an emphasis on social skills specific to the participation and evaluation of effective group experiences. However, many of the core skills identified by the ASGW ultimately emanate from a counseling perspective (Gladding 1999). As such they may well be limited in addressing contemporary challenges around diversity and power differences. What is missing is a focus on helping learning communities to engage in a continuous, critical, constructive dialogue around

stated and actual needs, as well as on the best way to collaborate toward achieving individual and community goals. Dialogue of this kind would help groups revisit their own collective understanding of their purpose and unique knowledge base.

Communicative Competencies for Helping Groups Learn

Imel and Tisdell (1996) have developed a useful organizing schema for looking at communicative competence for participation in groups. They move beyond the conventional focus on task and maintenance functions to other "connected areas" (p. 16). They also caution the facilitator against being overly nurturing because doing so can interfere with the community's responsibility for its own learning. Educators' responsibilities include helping groups to establish ground rules for discourse, to develop techniques for monitoring their progress, and to deal with other aspects of process, for example, teaching group techniques. They can stimulate movement beyond the group's comfort zone and help them to access outside resources. Imel and Tisdell note that approaches to addressing power and conflict in the field are inadequate. They suggest drawing on literary and cultural studies as well as critical and feminist theory to work with "structural factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation" in the group's dynamics (p. 19). Educators would thus move away from a primarily neutral "interpretive" role toward a more political role in stimulating new awareness and critique.

Educators should be more assertive in helping individuals "accept responsibility" and "gain comfort with the tensions that arise when significantly different people work together" (Thomas 1999, p. 222). This role includes helping groups to resolve conflict, articulate or express interests, and envision and experience alternative strategies for inclusion. Educators can create a relatively safe environment for addressing difficult issues. They can help the group by providing focus and structure, managing group dynamics and the environment, working with differences, and providing ongoing feedback. But just as learning groups vary in their objectives and constitution, so too does the role of the educator. Important personal qualities enhance trust and the ability to work well with the group; skills and abilities enhance effectiveness in group work (Imel and Tisdell 1996; Kiser 1998; Rees 1998). In addition, it is not easy to identify and address deeply held views without evoking strong feelings and confronting biases that do pit people against one another. Even though much is known about how to resolve conflicts (Deutsch 1973), people vary in their mental capacity to tolerate ambiguity and work with ongoing dilemmas (Kegan 1994).

In helping groups to look at their process, educators cannot focus solely on the group's articulated objectives. Stated goals that have not been "problematized" in the Freirean sense of the word are often based on a skewed view of reality that is influenced primarily by those who hold power. By trying to understand how and why this is so, groups are more likely to meet Cervero and Wilson's (1999) mandate to facilitate the "social vision" of learners. If the group is willing, educators can help members to understand and recognize their impact on others, on the quality of the conversation, and on the nature of group outcomes.

Facilitating the Individual's Ability to Partake in Community

Educators can also play a role in helping individuals to partake in community both as givers and receivers of its benefits. Paradoxically, we conclude that individuals can most effectively collaborate and co-create in community when they have thought deeply about their own unique identity, have formed clear understandings of self, and are able to function in fairly autonomous ways. Likewise, communities are best positioned to learn from members when there is a mechanism in place to support individual autonomy and creativity. Learning communities can thus help people balance a drive toward agreement and conformity in any organized social unit with the fresh views and original perspectives that such units need to feed their own originality and innovation. Postmodern views support the validity and value of individual viewpoints that diverge from that of the system as a whole even though they recognize that systems often suppress individuality. Keys to managing the balance between healthy autonomy and conformity are self-knowledge, collaborative critique, and critical evaluation of information.

Self-Knowledge

Individuals can be helped to understand and examine their personal responses to the changing environment. This is congruent with Hake's (1999) advocacy of "biographical reflexivity." Dominice (1990) advocates the use of educational biographies as a "means to reflect critically about the knowledge, the values, and the meaning constructed by adults through their life experiences" (p. 194). Such life history research helps learners to understand how they "became themselves . . . through the various contexts, life stages and people who were relevant to their education (ibid., p. 197).Through this process educators facilitate the learners' capability to generate their own questions. Learners are encouraged to challenge and "explain what they decided to do, what they chose to be, and how they think about the world around them" (p. 199). Dominice's argument, like that of Usher et al. (1997), is that learning takes place through a reorganization occasioned through, and situated in, experience. By examining learning in the context of social development, learners engage in a cultural journey by which they move out of the familiar culture into a newly envisioned one. Learning is no longer compensatory in this view; it is creative. Learning aids in the transformation of the learner's "models, values and knowledge of their upbringing" (Dominice 1990, p. 207). In cooperation with the learning community, the individual attempts to "reconcile the expectations of the social environment" with the desire to create a "unique existence" (ibid.).

One can engage in this kind of biographical work only when one is capable or skilled in self-assessment or self-critique–the ability to make reliable, impartial, judicious insights about oneself (and by extension, others). Marienau (1999) researched self-assessment in the context of work. An overwhelming majority of the participants in her study indicated that the very process of "self-assessment" had a positive impact on their essential character or "capabilities" and enhanced ability for interpersonal communications (p. 142). Marienau grouped outcomes into four overarching themes: "learning from experience," "functioning more

effectively," "strengthening commitment to competent performance," and "fostering self-agency and authority" (ibid., pp. 142-143). Marienau's findings allude to the relevance of critical self-assessment in domains other than work. Self-reflection is crucial to the development of autonomy yet its development cannot be clearly separated from the emergence of communicative ability. Discourse and dialogue are key to valid self-assessment and the development of communicative competence. Simultaneously, as individuals become stronger in themselves, they are able to stand up to group pressure and voice their own opinions while remaining open to alternative viewpoints. The group benefits because they are able to entertain and explore differences and similarities in meanings and interpretations.

Collaborative Critique

Individual autonomy and identity can be suppressed through participation in groups, but when people develop needed skills, they find they can advance their own agendas in community while likewise advancing the interests of the group as a whole. Action technologies (Bray et al. 2000; Brooks and Watkins 1994; Raelin 1999; Yorks et al. 1999) provide vehicles for collective inquiry that often benefits both individuals and the group. Participatory action research and collaborative research can help groups to extract and use learning about its own process and dynamics to revisit goals and to manage its work effectively (Jarvis 1999). Individuals become co-researchers in a process in which shared decisions are made about the nature of the study, the methods to be used, the questions to be posed, and the interpretation and utilization of results. Some action technologies also engage people in reflection on self-identity and group process. Through action technologies, subjects are empowered and are not relegated to the role of scrutiny by external "objective" experts. Although the process of engaging in education biographies is internally focused on self and one's own choices, collaborative inquiry is directed to real-world problems. The latter occasions the kind of learning suggested by the former.

When the right conditions are in place, people can help one another to recognize and understand facets of themselves that they might otherwise take for granted, not see, deny, or ignore. As people become more self-aware, their identity is less challenged by the critique of others. As Mezirow (1997) indicates, educators can help learners function "as more autonomous, socially responsible thinkers. . . autonomy here refers to the understanding, skills and dispositions necessary to become critically reflective of one's assumptions and to engage effectively in discourse" (p. 9). As Cervero and Wilson (1999) remind us, educators help individuals see how their assumptions are shaped by sociocultural assumptions and how their actions then shape the milieu in which they function. The educator's mandate is then to aid the individual learner in "negotiating his or her own values, meanings, and purposes, rather than to uncritically act on those of others" (Mezirow 1997, p. 11). People in community deconstruct and reconstruct identity in dialogue with others.

Critical Assessment of Information

Rapidly advancing technologies profoundly influence one's access to information and exponentially expand the sheer quantity of information that pours into

learning communities. Knowledge is available to those who can access it 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. One's capability of developing learning communities, partaking in them, and gaining knowledge is broadened. The individual, no longer bounded by time or space, can globally establish community and identity with those of like interest or needs. Individuals physically separated are no longer excluded from group participation. Even the arguable constraints of missed nonverbal cues and missing interpersonal interactivity ceases to pose a constraint with desktop videoconferencing and new streaming of video images. New tools enable groups to track their interaction. The Web allows each individual (with access) to become a creator and disseminator of information. At the same time, thorny issues emerge around privacy rights, confidentiality, inadequate screening for accuracy, and misrepresentation due to potential multiple, inauthentic, virtually constructed selves.

Learners are potentially subject to sieges or assaults of both information and misinformation. As such their need to develop critical evaluative faculties is ever more important. Learners in a community rapidly educate one another about the value of information. However, it is not always easy to assess the validity, accuracy, and value of conflicting information. Critical capacities have been discussed in the educational literature but now must be broadened to include the use and interpretation of new media. These capacities include "distinguishing between verifiable facts and value claims, distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information, determining factual accuracy, credibility of sources, identifying ambiguous claims and identifying unstated assumptions, detecting bias, logical fallacies, logical inconsistencies in lines of reasoning and determining strengths of an argument or claim" (Wlodkowski 1999, p. 214). Learners assess the quality of information they access through electronic and more traditional media by consulting others about their experience and by cross-validating what they find against other sources. They must develop skills in assessing the quality of information and their sources with respect to content, disclosure, links, design, interactivity and other admonitions. Whitson and Amstutz (1998) believe this leads to a new role for the educator in developing the information literate community. They refer to an information literacy cycle that includes "defining problems, locating resources, evaluating information, applying information and generating new information needed" (p. 377).

The evaluative competencies that learners must develop are reminiscent of those explicated by Brookfield in his work on developing critical thinkers. Though speaking of other media (television and other mass means of communication) Brookfield (1991) speaks to the urgency of aiding learners in encoding, decoding, deconstructing and developing autobiographical analysis skills. These capacities certainly apply to screening of information gained through the World Wide Web.

The educator's potential for reaching and working with diverse learning communities is also expanded through alternative distance formats. White and Bridwell (1998) envision new roles: "information counselors, facilitators of individualized learning, electronic instruction specialists, designers of continuing education about electronic communication, participants in research related to technological change and facilitators of international development and information exchange" (p. 397). These alternative formats allow for the development of interest discus-

sion groups, advocacy groups, and the expanded potential for mentoring. Educators can assist new communities of learners in using technology to meet their needs. However, a key limitation that surfaces is the great disparity of access to these resources.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter began with a definition of the learning community and a discussion of sociocultural learning models–social learning, experiential learning, situated cognition, and participation in communities of practice–that shed light on the highly interactive learning process in which people engage in these groups. Learning challenges ensue from multiple memberships in communities of practice. Educators assume new roles when they help learning communities, and their individual members, co-create knowledge through participation in these groups. Educators can help learners develop communicative competence and the ability to reflect critically on the differences that emerge when people with divergent views come together. They can help individuals develop self-awareness and self-knowledge that enables autonomy and that also leads people to contribute more richly to the community's knowledge base and communication processes. Finally, educators can assist in collaborative critique and in the ability to evaluate critically the vast array of information that people need to absorb, sort, and interpret in ways that are meaningful to themselves and others.

Individuals and communities must remain vigilant in reflecting on key questions related to the "meaningfulness" of learning. They need to problematize what they seek, identify who benefits from pursuing different interests as a community, and clarify the consequences of following different visions, purposes, and action strategies. Critically reflective communities can be more aware of how they go about seeking and sharing learning opportunities and information. Educators cannot ignore the embedded potential that communities have for challenging or altering existing norms and knowledge bases.

As was discussed in the preceding chapter, the conceptualization of learning communities as fluid, open systems (Capra 1996) implies choice and individual empowerment. However, people need to reconcile these potentialities with the reality of "mainstream cultures" that have historically included oppression and exclusion. Although learning may enable mobility, new alignments, and identifications, a contrasting reality suggests that not everyone is able to fully exercise choice. Hypothetically, the learning society affords individuals the ability to choose new lifestyle identities. Still there are certain communities that people do not choose and from which others do not separate them. Racial and gender discrimination in the United States provide exemplary cases. As is illustrated in the United States, bias against African Americans is an oppression that is systemic. Despite learning, education, or class, examples abound of the injustices promulgated as a result of institutionalized racism. We conclude with Cervero and Wilson (1999) that educators should advocate a more equitable social vision. Educators can take steps to provide access to resources and to counteract discrimination. They can help learners in developing networking skills and foster understandings that encompass rights to privacy, rights to confidentiality, and

rights to self-determination in all forms of communication and learning. Learners can be helped to develop creative alternatives and discover authenticity and voice (Brookfield 1995). Learners and educators can co-create a collective "vision" that welcomes diversity and provides a vehicle for individual identity and voice.

Educators can commit to making systems more equitable and to fighting forms of exploitation and oppression that are institutionalized. Such hegemonic demons include abuses that derive from marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism. Lankshear and McLaren (1993) urge us to question "freedom and creativity for what?" (p. 403). This leads to understanding and addressing the tensions between individual opportunity and social conformity that participation in society appear to produce naturally. These tensions are also portrayed as being at the "heart" of strategic renewal–the balance between exploration and exploitation (Crossan, Lane, and White 1999). As Maffesoli (1996) indicates, the "sociality" of the future learning society is "unprecedented," simultaneously "disturbing" and yet "exhilarating" (p. 142). Educators can model a way of being in which they co-create a meaningful and more just future by truly empowering themselves and others and by freeing up imaginative possibilities in the learning communities in which they participate as both educators and members.

Learning Societies

by Ruud van der Veen

In the last 3 decades many authors have broadly defined the concept of the *learning society* to include all sorts of economic, social, political, civic, and personal institutions. Ragatt, Edwards, and Small (1996) describe many of these variations in an anthology of more recent texts that discuss the learning society based on social theory focused on late modernity. In this chapter, the concept has been limited to society as the *political system* and its links to the *civil society* and participatory systems that involve the common citizen in the political process. The adjective *learning* refers here, as in the other chapters, to the fact that societal units can learn as a total system. In addition, the growing complexity and dynamics of the late modern society require that systems and their agents have to intensify their learning processes to remain effective in coping with more challenging conditions.

The first part of this chapter examines the way in which the domain of politics has changed in the late modern world, due to both a gradual shift from hierarchical, vertical political organization to *horizontal* public-private partnerships and to the gradual decrease in the use of ideology in politics. The second part of the chapter focuses on the learning of political systems, which can be described as a process of reproduction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of political narratives. Political learning is clearly demonstrated when common citizens join together and are educated to effectively take political action. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how adult educators can improve these learning processes.

The Changing Political System

How have political systems changed during the last decades? Developments such as globalization and the rise and fall of the welfare state have in common a gradual shift from hierarchical political organizations to horizontal public-private partnerships. As is shown in the following sections, this "horizontalization" had a strong impact on the character of political learning and education.

Globalization

Globalization refers to many intertwined phenomena. For example, globalization involves the growth of supra-national political bodies, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. Globalization also refers to the growth of the world economy, for instance through the growth of multinational corporations and the enormous increase of the world financial trade. Globalization may point to communication and transport technology, for instance the explosion of communication and information opportunities through computerized networks. Sassen (1998) provides a good overview of these developments and speaks to implications for the increased mobility of money, people, and information.

With respect to power relations the essential change is that supra-national bodies, multinational corporations and international financial institutions took away part of the sovereignty of national states. An international network of power holders on the global level has replaced the partly older, much more hierarchical and stable power relations on the national level. These new global power holders negotiate all sorts of treaties and contracts in order to prevent and solve problems that threaten the stability and further growth of the global society. This form of politics can be called *horizontal*, because it does not lead to a clear superimposed global political structure. The result is a patchwork of all sorts of new institutions and regulations. Falk (1995) wrote a quite interesting in-depth analysis of this movement toward global politics.

On the one hand, globalization contributes to the growth of the world economy; on the other hand, new problems arise from unequal distribution of wealth and from side effects such as environmental pollution. Beck (1986) has described the *risk society* that grows out of this combination of a delicate sharing of power in international networks and of new worldwide problems. Beck concentrates his analysis on the double risk of worldwide problems and inadequacy of traditional politics to solve these problems. In his closing argument he stresses the need for dialogue and consciousness raising in decentralized political structures and private "subpolitical" power centers (industry, science).

The new global social movements–for example, the environmental movement, the third world movement, and the peace movement–are important agents in fostering such dialogue and consciousness raising. International nongovernmental organizations play a central role in these movements where they are outspoken carriers of the interests of the common people. These organizations take on a role that is similar to that of the worker unions in earlier phases of modernization. Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco (1997) provide a good introduction to the role of these new social movements in global politics.

The Managerial State

The national level of politics has seen a comparable shift from vertical political organization to horizontal public-private networks, although this shift is less clear and less extreme. After the Second World War many rich Western countries rapidly developed into so-called welfare states that reached their highest levels as providers of social benefits in the 1970s. Welfare states expanded education, raised the general level of schooling, provided for healthcare, and created income maintenance systems. The 1980s saw a backlash of sentiment against generous provisions for a minority of disadvantaged people due to the inefficiency of bureaucratic providers and decreased political support from nonstate organizations and a majority of citizens. Clarke and Newman (1997) describe this transformation of the welfare state toward what they call a managerial state. The decreased use of bureaucracy has been variously described as decentra-lization, privatization of welfare provisions, or the creation of public-private partnerships.

Citizens in the managerial post-welfare state have moved from political participation in the strict sense–for instance, participation in elections and political parties–to forms of *civic participation* in the decentralized and privatized forms of

politics. The next section concentrates on two dominant forms of civic participation and the learning processes it stimulates, or even requires, for effective functioning. First, decentralization, public-private partnerships, and an increase of client participation lead to new types of *participatory systems*. These systems include, for example, community boards that oversee particular sectors of public-private provisions, councils that represent clients with particular interests, and "not-in-my-backyard" interest groups that try to influence political decisions. Second, the move toward lean efficient organizations reinstated interest in participation of volunteers. Rifkin (1995) describes "the end of work" as it was known in the industrial era. He suggests that the role played by corporations and the public sector in the economy will be reduced and that the vacuum will be filled worldwide by greater participation in a third sector of voluntary work.

The Dynamics of Political Learning

The move toward global and national horizontal political structures makes politics in late modernity more complex and dynamic than it was before the 1970s. It is more difficult for citizens nowadays to understand and influence political decision making. But the decline of ideology–or "de-ideologization"–makes things more difficult because it leads to *instrumentalization* and to what is here called an *aesthetization* of politics. It prompts one to ask whether there is any difference between political manipulation and political education under these new late modern conditions.

De-ideologization

For a long time, ideological grand narratives helped citizens to understand central problems in politics and their possible solutions. This is not the case today, in part because of the shift to horizontal structures in politics. New political networks have formed around shared interests in an effort to create win-win situations. Partners in such horizontal negotiations have to adopt business-like ways to reach consensus. This is true for professional politics at government levels, but is also true for citizen groups formed around concrete interests on the local level.

De-ideologization also seems to be an independent development. In late modernity there has been a general decrease of trust in the great traditional narratives, as Lyotard (1979) analyzed in his landmark book. Political organizations have to formulate their own "small narratives" that guide their political action on the long term.

Instrumentalization

At the surface, de-ideologization seems to lead to an *instrumentalization* of politics that emphasizes *effectiveness and expert knowledge*. At least this is true on the level of professional politics.

International negotiations, often involving nongovernmental organizations, have begun to function like businesses. Concrete issues dominate the political agenda and experts play a key role in the creation of effective strategies. Global horizontal

politics are dominated by an elite of officials, managers, and professionals. In the emerging transnational civic society, created by the new social movements, professionals deal with complicated negotiations in the global power networks.

Moreover, on the national level, welfare politics have become pragmatic. Politics less frequently involves ideals for a future society; it is now primarily about management of contemporary society and its existing provisions. Political programs have become more practical in their orientation and more like one another in their implementation. Politics in the postwelfare managerial state also professionalized. Although political parties still exist, they are losing members. Political parties are no longer mass movements, but serve mainly as a base for enlistment of new members of the political elite.

Aesthetization

So at the surface the de-ideologization of the political debate seems to have led to an instrumentalization of politics with a focus on effectiveness and efficiency. Although less obvious, the process of de-ideologization has also led to an *aesthetization* of politics with a focus on *personal commitment and community*. The general public has lost its trust in great political narratives, but it did not follow professionals toward the instrumentalization of politics. Instead, the public has moved toward the crystallization of political issues as symbolic actions and individual commitments that enable citizens to express their feelings of anger, concern, and solidarity. Lichterman's (1996) research highlights these new forms of "personalized politics," particularly for environmental groups. Giddens (1991) refers to this phenomenon as the emergence of life politics, which he defines as the politics of self-realization in the context of the dialectic of the local and the global.

To illustrate, the success of global social movements has been due largely to the ability of these movements to translate complex instrumental negotiations into powerful issues that symbolize underlying solidarity, responsibilities, and values that are at stake. Symbolization is not a new phenomenon in politics (Edelman 1971, 1988). However, the new social movements have perfected this art. Successful examples of *symbolization* include the following:

- Symbolization of environmental problems in the spectacular actions of Greenpeace
- Symbolization of poverty in the adoption program of Foster Parents
- Symbolization of threats to human rights in the defense of political activists by Amnesty International
- Symbolization of the dangers of modern warfare in the campaign to ban land mines

Within the postwelfare state, citizens become active not for ideological reasons but because of commitment to rather concrete issues, ranging from the quality of life in the neighborhood to the care for frail elderly or homeless people. By becoming politically active in community groups or as volunteers, people have found personal meaning and self-realization. Ranson (1994) further elaborates how

political education on the local level can bring together the private world of self-creation and the public world of justice.

Education, Not Manipulation

In light of this, what is the difference between political manipulation and political education? How can citizens be helped to understand these political values and perspectives, given that the underlying political values are not clear from the outset as might be the case with traditional ideologies?

Some would argue that only politically neutral institutions can provide authentic nonmanip-ulative, political education. That is an illusion. Political reasoning is always more or less partisan. Educational institutions that pretend to be neutral leave their political sympathies expressed in a form that is primarily implicit. Neutrality is not the solution. Rather, the solution is to be as explicit as possible about one's political orientation (Finn 1991; Strike 1988). Being explicit involves epistemic rules such as the following:

- The underlying mission and purpose of a political narrative–i.e., the political *construction* that integrates the information–must be clear from the outset.
- There must be ample opportunity to discuss, i.e., to *deconstruct* the narrative and to juxtapose it with other narratives.
- Possibilities must be created for people who are not convinced to develop, on the basis of information provided, a personal *reconstruction* of the facts and arguments.

The public information services of nations are an example of a further instrumentalization of political narratives. They produce, for example, many reports and leaflets that are meant to inform the citizenry. But such public information can easily become manipulative. Public information is educative only to the extent that it offers possibilities for deconstruction and reconstruction of that same information. For instance, public information services could instead make their underlying premises clear from the beginning, offer alternative ways to construct the information, lead toward alternative solutions, organize public debates in the mass media or on the local level, or support citizen groups that advocate different perspectives on the same issue. But one may wonder how effective such efforts could be, given that, as stated earlier, the general public tend toward the crystallization of political issues in symbolic actions and individual commitments that facilitate citizens to express their feelings of anger or concern.

However, aesthetization and symbolization can also become manipulative. A central strategy of the new social movements is the launching of *campaigns* that often resemble commercial campaigns designed to sell a particular product. Another important strategy is the construction of *aesthetic communities*. People are brought together to demonstrate for a particular good cause. Such demonstrations are not unlike music festivals or sport championships. They create feelings of belonging and uniqueness. At the same time, these demonstrations engender a widely recognized risk of political manipulation and could create a mass psychosis. Therefore, in order to warrant being characterized as educational in nature,

movements should provide opportunities for sharing of in-depth information and for open discussion. The new social movements should try to avoid manipulation at all costs. They might make their wider mission clear from the outset, offer background information, discuss counter-arguments, invite people to their activities who defend different positions, organize debates in small groups, avoid pressure to join the action and provide opportunities to leave the event.

Finally, independent educational institutes may still be the best facilitators for a critical discussion of instrumental and aesthetical constructions of the political world. Nonetheless, if a public center for adult education does get involved in social movements, the center should be clear that it wants to contribute to awareness of the issue, for example, environmental pollution or worldwide poverty. Such a center should be clear in its advertising about the nature of programs that it supports, what sort of information will be given at an event, and what is left open for discussion in the program.

Learning in Political Systems

Discussion thus far has focused on the dynamics of political learning in late modernity for "the learning society" as a whole with a view toward understanding how political education could be improved and how it can avoid political manipulation. The next section looks at how political systems themselves learn. The focus here is on learning processes in nonprofessional political systems even though general principles apply to political organization on all levels. The reasons are rather simple:

- It is crucial for democracy that these organization and groups of common citizens learn to function adequately.
- At the same time, it is exactly in these groups of inexperienced citizens that it becomes clear where political learning becomes tough.
- Finally, it is here that the support of educators is needed to improve such learning.

Action and Collaboration

At the surface, political learning is oriented toward action and performance. It is focused on what must be done in order to reach specific purposes. In the literature on community development and citizen participation, this has been often called instrumental learning or the *task* aspect of political learning. Instrumental learning requires expert knowledge.

Based on personal experience as a researcher and trainer of political groups, I have observed that (elected and appointed) political professionals tend to stress the instrumental aspect of citizen groups. Political professionals, being themselves experts, want to educate active citizens to become semiprofessionals, i.e., the same sort of politician they try to be. For instance, they see political education mainly as instruction in legal or technical matters (environmental pollution, urban renewal, etc.). Politicians, for example, might foster environmental groups as a way to disseminate knowledge about environmentally risky habits. But citizen groups

themselves do not seem to be very interested in such education. They thrive on their local and personal knowledge of the issues addressed, and they assimilate bits of expert knowledge that emerge in the process of doing and performing.

This leads to the second aspect of political learning. Doing and performing in politics is essentially communicative, whether it involves conflict or cooperation. In the literature on community development and citizen participation, this has been often called the *process* aspect of political learning. I define the process requirement as building and maintaining relations within the group and/or with relevant partners.

In my experience, citizen groups are most interested in learning required communicative competencies. They ask mainly for training in social-political competencies, such as effective negotiation, improving internal collaboration, chairing meetings, or speaking in public. Most manuals for citizen education stress the training of such social-political competencies. An interesting phenomenon is that, for citizen groups, politics is not so much about expert knowledge but about communication. Citizen groups are not interested in becoming part of instrumentalized politics but prefer to develop their own aesthetic style of handling political problems. This aesthetic style satisfies two basic needs: on the one hand, *expressing* personal interests and feelings about politics; and on the other hand, *sharing* these interests and feelings with people who are similar. Aesthetization is not just individualism, but also, as Maffesoli (1995) stresses, a longing for community.

These task and process aspects of political learning in citizen groups have been discussed at length in handbooks for community development. Most of these books were published in the 1960s and 1970s. Little new has been added in recent years, perhaps because the subject is less popular with the public, but also because there is little new to say about these competencies. My personal favorites, which still offer a valid and excellent analysis, are Brager and Specht (1973) and Burghardt (1982). A more recent good introduction to the task aspect of community development is the book by Halpern (1995) and to the process aspect, the work of Davies and Herbert (1993).

Deconstruction and Reconstruction

There is a third aspect of political learning. Instrumental and communicative learning ultimately comes down to the deconstruction and reconstruction of political narratives. Political action can no longer be embedded in one of the great narratives. Political organizations and groups have to deconstruct different instrumental narratives and then reconstruct them in the form of their own "small narratives" that express the values, intuitions, and feelings of their members. In the literature this has been called critical reflection or just *reflection*.

Reflection often starts by challenging instrumental and communicative aspects: Is our diagnosis of the problem correct? Is our performance effective? But at the end reflection is always about the fit between the actual functioning of the group and its goals and purposes. And, more precisely, in a political world without clear

ideological directions, reflection leads toward a fundamental discussion about what exactly the goals of the group are or should be. What sort of world do we want? Such discussion often starts in the margin of regular meetings, but often results in unresolved discussions that form the agenda of special sessions on the mission of the group and its long-term goals. Reflective learning in particular is the weakness of both professional political organizations and, even more so, of nonprofessional groups. And it can become a fatal weakness under the conditions of more complex and de-ideologized politics in late modernity.

Literature on critical reflection cannot easily be found in the literature on community development but it is found in the literature on adult education. This discussion has been dominated since the 1970s by the approach of Freire (1997). An excellent more recent book in that tradition has been published by Smith (1994), although in line with the more skeptical mood of late modernity, Smith replaces the Freirean concept of dialogue with Gadamer's more moderate concept of "conversation." In the 1990s the discussion has turned to adult learning within social movements (Finger 1989; Holford 1995; Welton 1993). Eyerman and Jameson (1991) describe social movements as a "cognitive praxis," a laboratory for the development of new political narratives. Wildemeersch et al. (1998) propose an interesting model for the analysis of social learning in participatory systems that integrates the elements of political learning along four axes (instead of the three I mentioned): action, collaboration, communication, and reflection.

The following more detailed description of this process of deconstruction and reconstruction is based on Johnson and Johnson (2000), authors who address critical reflection as well as the task and process elements of group learning. Johnson and Johnson refer to deconstruction and reconstruction as differentiation and integration of different perspectives. Deconstruction and reconstruction can also be compared with Kolb's (1984) concepts of assimilation and accommodation. Deconstruction of ideological and instrumental narratives can be described as a process of assimilation of different perspectives on the political purpose of the group. This results, at best, in more ideas, insights, and strategies that no member could individually have identified. A group is also more effective than most individuals in the recognition and rejection of incorrect or unacceptable narratives.

The process of reconstruction is the counterpart of deconstruction. Different and paradoxical facts and arguments are accommodated in a new coherent framework. In political learning, reconstruction is crucial in building consensus. The phenomenon of *group polarization* (Meyers and Lamm 1976) demonstrates that groups can develop a consensus that is a qualitative shift from the earlier individual perspectives, a shift that can be more risky or more cautious than the earlier individual perspectives. Ideally, each consensus is temporary, because it has to be tested again and again when new insights and critiques come to the fore.

Autonomy and Creativity

The discussion of political learning processes thus far has been at the level of the group. Deconstruction is indeed a typical group process that leads to more facts and arguments than most participants could generate on their own and provides

for a greater degree of critique of incorrect and unacceptable perspectives. But such deconstruction processes could easily become chaos if no participants offer ways to reconstruct this information. So here we see a clear role for the individual. The group is ultimately dependent on autonomous and creative participants who can formulate possible reconstructions of ideas. The group not only thrives on such creative thinking of individual participants; it also stimulates it. Ultimately, critical reflection in the group is also a trigger, a strong incentive for the development of creative thinking in individuals.

But what is this creativity exactly? How can individuals get a better grip on deconstructed, fragmented knowledge? How do people choose and mix different constructions when juxtaposed? Most authors refer to creativity as something that goes beyond, or rather underlies, rational thinking. For instance, philosophers refer to it as a shift from instrumental and normative toward aesthetic judgments (Früchtl 1996; Habermas 1981). Wenger (1998) refers to it as the experience of meaning. In their discussion of learning organizations, Crossan, Lane, and White (1999) refer to it as a unique individual process based on intuition. Bellah et al. (1985), in their definition of expressive individualism, refer to it as a unique core of feeling and intuition.

This moment of creative reconstruction illustrates the reasons why de-ideologized politics moves beyond instrumentalization toward an essentially aesthetical character. This movement is less clear on the level of professional politics because these highly sophisticated political agents wrap the reconstructions of their judgments, meanings, and intuitions in lots of facts. The shift is clearer in citizen groups that bypass this instrumentalization in the formulation of their commitment.

Facilitating a Learning Climate

I have stated that in many groups this third element of political learning, the element of critical learning, is rather weak. Why is this so? There is a tendency in communication to suppress critical thinking. This phenomenon has been described in the literature as *groupthink* (Janis 1982). Among the many reasons for this are the following: directive leadership does not allow open and critical group discussions and group members commonly fear that they will damage the cohesion of the group by making critical remarks. Groupthink limits deconstruction of political narratives by setting limits on the sort and amount of facts, arguments, and perspectives that are allowed in the discussion.

In addition, communication and the presence of others seem to stimulate people's thinking and learning. However, critical learning requires a good mix of competition and cooperation. Competition seems to work better with simple tasks. But when tasks become more complicated, competition raises feelings of anxiety and insecurity, which in turn increase the likelihood of conformity (Johnson and Johnson 2000). Communicative learning then materializes only under the condition of an open learning climate.

The Role of the Adult Educator

Educational support can facilitate these learning processes in political groups. Three different educational roles can be identified that are sometimes found combined in one person.

Information and Training

First, the educator can inform the wider public, the organization, the group. Two conditions can make this role more effective. First, the educator should make clear from the beginning what the underlying construction is that integrates facts and arguments. In addition, such information should always be connected with a critical discussion of such a construction, allowing deconstruction, juxtaposition of political constructions, and reconstruction by the participants. Second, the educator can train groups in social-political skills. Educators can help develop these skills, but they should be aware that embedded in strategic communication is a need for critical reflection that connects the short-term business of the group with the deeper meaning and long-term purposes of political action for its participants.

Facilitation

Sometimes adult educators are also hired to organize and facilitate seminars to stimulate reflection or critical reflection within the group. Their skills may be needed because there is a conflict in the group, or because there is a need to reflect on long-term objectives. Education as facilitation of critical reflection is, as argued earlier, essentially the facilitation of an open learning climate, preventing "groupthink" and internal competition.

Advising

Embedded in both forms of education mentioned here may be a need for individual mentoring, coaching, or advising of individuals. This need is especially evident when an educator is involved in longer-term support of political and civic groups, for instance by professionals in community development or professional coordinators of groups of volunteers. The main objective of such individual advising is the fostering of autonomy and creativity in individual participants.

Such advising is necessarily rather nondirective, reinforcing in the individual participant a highly personal style. It is often not formalized, but happens while working in a informal relation of advisor and apprentice. Advising of this kind does not just improve cognitive learning processes, but also supports self-realization in a broad sense, the expression of the personal unique core of intuition and feelings, and the development of characteristics such as courage and endurance.

Summary and Discussion

The focus of this chapter is on the learning society as a learning political system and particularly the participation of citizens in learning processes. My analysis is founded in *social theory* on late modernity as a risk society and more in particular in theory on globalization, new social movements, and the transition of the welfare state toward a managerial state.

My analysis of the *dynamics of learning* rests on three assumptions:

1. Typical for late modern politics is the combined development of horizontal political relations and de-ideologization of political debates.
2. De-ideologization leads in politics to both instrumentalization, stressing expert information, and aesthetization, stressing personal commitment.
3. Aesthetization crystallizes in the symbolization of the public debate by the new social movements and an emphasis on learning social-political skills in citizen groups.

Within this framework, the *learning process of political systems* has been described in general as a combination of (1) learning to fulfill instrumental tasks, (2) learning social-political skills, and (3) learning critical reflection. Citizen groups take up rather uncomplicated instrumental tasks and often do not ask for educational support in the sense of information transfer. Instead, citizen groups more often ask for training in social-political skills. The weakest point in the functioning of citizen groups is their reluctance to engage in critical reflection.

Learning of critical reflection involves deconstruction and reconstruction of political narratives. Group discussions are superior, compared to individual thinking, in the *de*-construction of political narratives. But groups are dependent on individual participants, and particularly their creativity and autonomy, for the *re*-construction of the group's own idiosyncratic political narrative. Critical reflection leads to both a better understanding of the complex and dynamic political context and the development of innovative forms of political action.

The role of the adult educator in improving political learning processes is a combination of (1) the transfer of essential information and skills, (2) the facilitation of a learning climate in groups, and (3) the advising of individual participants in the development of their creativity and autonomy.

How valid is this perspective of political learning for the future? It could be argued that my analysis of the political context will not hold for the future. It is quite possible that the tendency to horizontalization stops halfway, because politics is, as Fukuyama (1999) states, finally about maintaining authority over other domains in society. And maybe the shift to aesthetization of politics is not the mark of a new century, as Maffesoli (1995) states, but only a characteristic of a transition period from static traditional ideologies to a more dynamic process of ongoing construction and deconstruction of political narratives.

Whatever the precise development, it seems very likely that two basic challenges in political learning and education will be sustained. Education can and should be actively involved in both. First, people are challenged to understand an *increasing complex and dynamic political context*. Eyerman and Jamison (1991) described this, with respect to social movements, as the engagement in new "cognitive practices," i.e., new, more adequate constructions of the political environment. Second, people are challenged to develop *innovative and creative forms of political action*. Beck (1994) describes this, with respect to new decentralized forms of political action, as "the reinvention of politics," i.e., the invention of new forms of critique and commitment that fit better with people's intentions and competencies.

This is the dual challenge for political education. Will this challenge emerge? People seem to be reluctant to enter such fundamental reflective and creative processes. Political groups tend to protect their cohesion by avoiding critical discussions about their goals and their effectiveness. Individuals seem to resist the painful process of regularly assessing and adapting their political perspectives. The new conditions of a complex and dynamic world seem to require in the first place the courage and endurance to become autonomous and creative individual thinkers.

Conclusion and Discussion

In the introduction we formulated central questions for this monograph: How do social units collectively learn? And how can adult educators work with these social units to enhance their learning? In this final chapter, we draw conclusions about the nature of collective learning, compare similarities and differences across social units, look at the role of the adult educator, and raise questions for future research and practice.

Nature of Collective Learning

Systems learn collectively when individuals, consciously and often tacitly, experience disjuncture. Doubt fuels people's alternative attempts to reach goals, reduce discomfort, or otherwise align with expectations (their own or that of others). Systems cannot learn unless members learn, but systems do not always capture and act on their knowledge. Systems learning is social and occurs as members act and then reflect on their experience. People make meaning of their experiences together through verbal and nonverbal conversation. They may or may not actively deconstruct and reconstruct their understanding, and they may or may not critique the way their meaning has been shaped by taken-for-granted assumptions of the culture, society, and social unit. Learning within social units is influenced by the boundaries of the unit but members often transcend boundaries because of their multiple and sometimes simultaneous participation in many communities. It may be easier for some social units to assert a common identity because the voice of influential members may prevail over silent opinions and thoughts of other members. In any case, individual members, and often the system as a whole, create identity through interaction and action with others in these bounded systems.

Social theorists think differently about how learning occurs. Lemert (1999) describes social theory as focused on modernization, reflective of a critical perspective, and oriented toward verbalizing phenomena that are implicit. We have verbalized underlying learning processes that are related to social, economic and cultural developments in the last few decades. We recognize that social learning can flourish without intervention, but we have focused on areas that we think can be influenced through the intervention of educators. We have also emphasized deep layers of learning rather than incremental, instrumental gains.

Table 2 highlights similarities and differences in learning across social units organized for work, lifestyle preferences, and political or civic participation.

Table 2: Commonalities and Differences in Learning of Organizations, Communities, and Society

Learning Organization	Learning Community	Learning Society
Conceptualization of the Social Unit that Affects Learning Processes		
• Changes in economy, jobs • Shift to knowledge era • Focus on intellectual capital • Shaped by organizational structure, culture, systems	• Grouped individuals • Shaped by discourse • Driven by needs and interests • Relatively voluntary and fluid	• Risk society • Globalization • New social movements • Postwelfare state
Dynamics of Learning		
• Learning through experience, sensemaking • Tacit learning that is made explicit and captured by system • Basis in open systems and chaos theory	• Multimembership • Critique of social givens • Personal mastery • Communicative competence • Social learning • Virtual selves, new identities	• Horizontalization • De-ideologization • Instrumentalizaiton • Aesthetization • Symbolization
Focus on Collaboration/Conflict		
• Focus on group learning • Conflict not well surfaced • Action technologies as social learning laboratory	• Conflict arises from multiple membership, interpersonal dynamics, political influence • Conflict minimized by fluid movement out of communities	• Sharing expert knowledge • Developing sociopolitical skills
Focus on Communication		
• Focus on feedback loops • Constructivist perspective that emphasizes meaning making	• Agreement on rules and boundaries • Stimulation of communication due to conflict, globalization, technology, multimemberships	• Deconstruction and reconstruction of narratives
Focus on Critical Thinking and Autonomy		
• Doubleloop learning enables questioning of assumptions and inquiry into tacit knowledge	• Critical thinking and autonomy become life project • Opportunity for deconstruction and reconstruction of self	• Critical thinking: deconstruction of narratives • Autonomy: reconstruction of narratives
Focus on Creativity		
• Innovation as central focus of individuals and systems • Role played by social capital	• Empowerment to envision alternatives • Development of self juxtaposed against community	• Innovative reconstruction of political narrative
Strategies to Enhance Learning of the Social Unit		
• Attention to environment • Attention to choice • Attention to organization structure, culture, systems	• Cocreation of groups • Valuing of diversity • Collaborative inquiry, participatory action research	• Development of innovative forms of political action

Learning Organization	Learning Community	Learning Society
Strategies to Enhance Learning of Individuals within the Social Unit		
• Support for personal learning mastery and opportunities	• Self-awareness, self-assessment • Biographical reflexivity • Development of commitment • Appreciation of consequences	• Understanding of complex and dynamic political context
Role of Adult Educator toward Social Unit as a System		
• Identify and work with people who learn on behalf of the system • Create laboratories for social learning (action technologies) • Work to change culture, structure, systems	• Facilitate learning climate • Facilitate group competence • Recognize role as transmitter, translator, and cocreator • Challenge hegemonic influences on task definition	• Facilitate learning climate • Facilitate task and process • Give information and training
Role of Adult Educator toward Individuals within the Social Unit		
• Help individuals learn collaboratively with others • Help people rethink meaning of lives visavis organization	• Facilitate learning competence • Empower through biographical competence and commitment to action • Model balance	• Advise members

Differences across Social Units

Theory on late modernity crystallizes differently for the three domains we analyzed. These differences can be highlighted by applying three concepts from chapter two: attention to environment, attention to social units, and attention to choice.

All three chapters stress the increasingly complex, dynamic, and confusing *environment*. The chapter on learning organizations conceptualizes this further with *dynamic systems/chaos* theory (Capra 1996). The chapter on learning communities stresses *detraditionalization*, in particular the dissolution of the local community and the emergence of lifestyle networks of interpersonal relationships. The chapter on the learning society describes the more complex environment as the *risk society*, referring to worldwide problems as environmental pollution, unequal distribution of wealth, and a horizontalization/decentering of political systems.

With respect to the *social units* studied, learning organizations have the clearest external boundaries, and therefore, better developed internal structures and systems. Learning communities are more open and fluid, especially when they form around lifestyle choices. In the domain of politics, some units are very open and fluid, for example, those organized for public debate. Others are more structured, for example, government bodies and some civic action groups. The more

open and fluid the social unit, the more difficult it might be to identify and trace learning processes. This poses a different kind of challenge to adult educators related to their ability to grapple with ambiguous contextual influences.

At first glance, *choices* seem to differ greatly across these social units. In the instrumental domain of work, choices are mainly about effectiveness and efficiency. In the self-fulfilling domain of the lifestyle community, choices are mainly about identity and authenticity. In the communicative domain of politics, choices are ultimately about consensus as to what is right and just behavior. But there is also substantial overlap. For example, people in organizations often participate in communities of practice (Wenger and Snyder 2000) through which they pursue personal and professional interests. Learning organizations are also subpolitical centers that have to take in account their political/ethical responsibilities (Beck 1994). People in learning communities need to acknowledge and think through challenges posed by organizational or political boundaries. Learning communities often generate citizen groups that set out to defend political interests of these communities. And although politics is concerned with order and justice, we have described trends toward both instrumentalization (focused on effectiveness) and aesthetization (expression of identity through political action).

Commonalties across Social Units

Generally speaking, people and social units react to a more complex and dynamic environment by an intensified communication leading to the creation of new modes of behavior. Intensified communication can lead to consensus on planned change although the likelihood that this will happen, and that it will appropriately represent the views of members, depends on many things. Communication needs to be reinterpreted as collective meaning making and not just information transmission. Critical reflection enables people to bring to the surface and examine distorted feelings, beliefs, and assumptions that may get in the way of reaching consensus or lead people to goals and practices that are discriminatory or intentionally harmful. Sensitizing foci that greatly influence the quality and quantity of communication are the vision, purpose, rules, and norms created by the social unit.

Communication may be easier when the boundaries of the social unit are clearly defined, but this is not always the case. Communication is enhanced with freedom of access and constructive critique. In more open and fluid systems (public political debate, lifestyle debates) the more confusing, complex, and dynamic environment leads to more communication, such as attention in mass media or campaigns. Communication may then lead to a variety of creative solutions, each of which has its followers. In the absence of mechanisms or motivation to reach consensus, people may then become fragmented. This happens within organizations as well. In lifestyle communities, people may simply create a new network.

Learning Challenges

Two related challenges stand out across these social units. First, it is not easy for people and groups to engage in critical thinking, even though the quality of learning is often significantly improved when they do. Second, conflict and other

challenges to interaction within groups often leads people to get "stuck" when they try to communicate with one another. The monograph highlights several reasons for these interrelated phenomena.

Directive leadership may not allow for open and critical discussion. Leaders may not know how to open people up to inquiry and dialogue, and they often favor one set of interests over another. Many communities are not perceived as safe places for public critique. When boundaries are fluid, people may choose to leave rather than follow goals or practices they cannot embrace. As Lewis (2000) notes: "Anyone who doubts just how vulnerable the boss now is need only visit the Web site of Vault.com, where employees of such places as United Parcel Service and Boeing exchange information about superiors" (p. 48). Technology puts people in touch with both information and social support for change.

In addition, people find it difficult to identify and resolve conflicting points of view. They may need help in testing their perceptions about the safety of an environment, and they may need skills of inquiry and dialogue so they can effectively pose confrontational issues (Argyris and Schön 1978, 1996). Given that technology has significantly multiplied the information available to people, they may need help in sifting through information, clarifying their own point of view, integrating these elements in innovative strategies, and moving from ideas to action.

Even then, people can encounter systemic biases due to characteristics such as gender or race. This can lead to the suppression of critical learning and to the phenomenon of "groupthink" (Janis 1982). Once again, fluid boundaries also enable people to leave many groups that no longer meet their needs or suit their values. They can withdraw commitment (Maffesoli 1996) or they may discover courage to speak out regardless of forces that conspire toward conformity.

Boundaries get blurred when thinking about learning within and across social units. Open systems theory (Capra 1996) emphasizes the holistic, interdependent, integrated nature of learning. Individual or community learning ultimately have an impact on organizational and societal learning, which in turn affects individual and community awareness. The flow and direction of impact, as well as the nonlinear nature and indeterminacy of the process reminds us that learning is an unrelenting process demanding "respect, cooperation, and dialogue" (Capra 1996, p. 193). Capra notes that it is not easy to apply scientific theories from physical sciences to human beings because "human social systems exist not only in the physical domain but also in a symbolic social domain" (p. 211). Capra goes on to discuss the crucial role of language in the development of social systems. The fact that individuals have the ability to choose makes the delineation of networks of communication very fluid. Hence, individual learning affects others and ultimately learning, outside of the organization, can affect that of the organization itself.

Role of the Adult Educator

We ground our thoughts on the role of adult educators in the realization that they do not stand outside the social systems in which they intervene. They are often

members of these systems; as such, they co-create knowledge. They must understand the unique learning needs of both the system as a whole and of the individuals with whom they are working. Although simple in concept, this requirement is not at all easy to carry out. As is also true in adult development theory (Kegan 1994), one cannot help people and a system to engage in complex learning unless one is equally able to do so in one's own thinking and action. To be effective in these new roles, educators need to turn first to their own biographical reflexivity (Dominice 1990).

We have identified a number of strategies and tools for working with individuals collaboratively, critically, communicatively, and creatively. A few are highlighted here. On the *level of the social unit* a key function is to create an open learning climate so that people can speak freely as well as engage in constructive criticism and dialogue. Social learning is facilitated through action technologies (Brooks and Watkins 1994) that enable people to reflect together on action. Action technologies enable people to improve instrumental results. Some action technologies also help members to probe more deeply around communicative competence and can engage members in critical self reflection or emancipatory action. On the *level of the individual participants* adult educators can stimulate autonomy and creativity by supporting learner pursuit of self-awareness, self-assessment, and self-realization. They can support learners through mentoring, advising, and enhancing experiential learning.

For Further Consideration

People and social units may initially seek, and benefit from, effectively designed instrumental learning. In this monograph, we suggest that adult educators go beyond the teaching of technical knowledge and training of technical skills. At the same time, we recognize that individuals and social systems may not be ready, willing, or able to move toward deeper, critical learning. Questions that are raised by this monograph include, for example: In whose interest are these educational and learning processes? Is change a matter of social engineering in the interest of perpetuation of practices by those in power? When is intervention in the interest of participating individuals? To what extent do social units and educators have the right to intrude on individuals' development of self-identity by challenging them to transform their views of their worlds and their lives? Finally, what do social units and educators do when they find that some individuals either cannot respond, or choose not to respond, to these new challenges?

The educational strategies we have discussed focus especially on interpersonal and intrapersonal learning. Such facilitation can intrude on privacy and invade areas of personality or other factors that affect the core identity of learners. We believe that deep learning leads to empowerment and fostering of self-realization. But deep learning can also be implemented in ways that resemble social engineering and social control when the focus is more on the well-being and effectiveness of the social unit. Social units can cross a fine line between alignment around a vision and coercion toward conformity. So in particular situations for particular people, "empowerment" could in fact become alienation or even oppression.

We believe that the best way to address this dilemma is for the educator to share his / her thinking as fully and completely as possible with learners as they co-construct knowledge. Of course, there are limits to such sharing, some of which are imposed by the nature of the social unit and others of which are caused by the personality or capacity of either learners or educators (Kegan 1994). Educators need to continually raise questions about the enterprise (Usher, Bryant, and Johnston 1997). They cannot mindlessly follow the perceived dictates of themselves, the learners, or the system. Differences need to be constructively revealed, discussed, and resolved. Opportunities can be provided for people to opt out of particular groups and particular learning ventures without being punished for their reluctance to participate.

It is not easy to understand or assess the intrusion of social units in the learning lives of individuals. There is a European tradition that resists such invasion of private life. We could have cited here Heidegger (1959), defending "resignation," Habermas (1981), opposing "colonization" of the lifeworld, or Foucault (1980), analyzing an increased "surveillance" of citizens. Perhaps more evocative is the musing of Austrian/German poet Rainer Maria Rilke who arrived in Paris, where he would work for a while as the secretary of the sculptor Rodin. Rilke describes Paris, metaphor for modernization, as driven by life instinct (the instinct *to have*, immediately, completely) that is close to death wish. He offers as an alternative just "life," *to be*, as something quieter, broader, and simpler.

We close with a metaphor that comes from the Luba people in sub-Saharan Africa who consult a mnemonic device called a "lukasa" when confronted with important personal or group decisions. "[A] hand-held, flat wooden object studded with beads and pins, or covered with incised or carved ideograms" (Roberts 1996, p. 285), the lukasa holds layers of cognitive and affective meaning related to medicine, architecture, geography, and genealogy. People consult "rigorously trained 'men of memory'" of the Mbudye society who"read" the lukasa and help individuals to take advantage of the collective wisdom of the tribe (ibid.). Thus, interpretation of the lukasa is richly contextual. It varies by reader and with contingencies of the occasion, demonstrating that there is "not an absolute or collective memory" of the Luba past, "but many memories, and many histories" (ibid.). The tribe then adds to the memory embedded in the lukasa with each reading. Readers help the tribe to reinterpret the past in light of the present. The tribe thus selectively learns and passes on its knowledge through the active agency of individuals who are officially designated to its memory. However, they do not act alone or arbitrarily. They co-construct meaning with those who consult them, listen to them, and act on what they hear. The lukasa represents the collective memory of the group; though to date, in modern communities, it is less common for memory to emerge as eloquently evocative or colorfully concrete.

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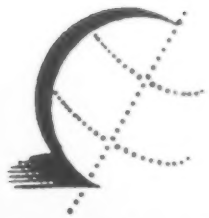

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